篠房六郎
Shinofusa Rokurou

# ナツノヤモ

4

篠房六郎

Spring Web

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# スパイダー

spinning web

4

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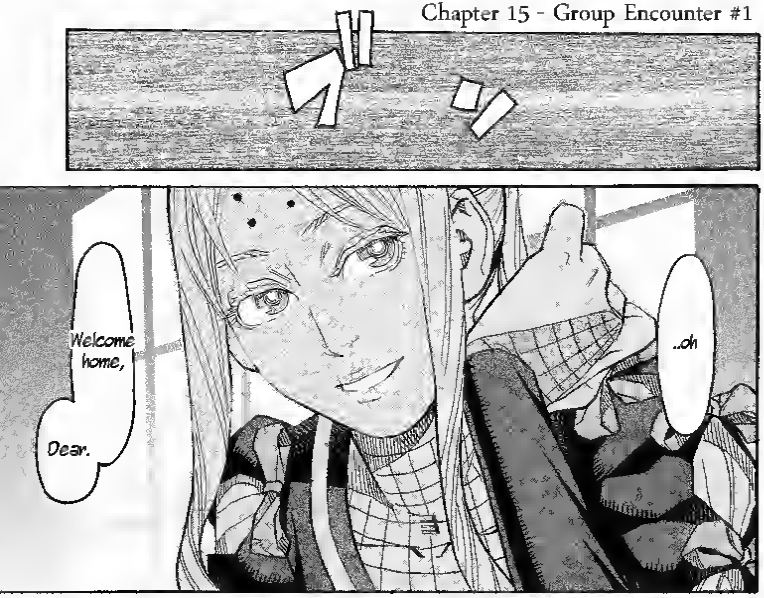
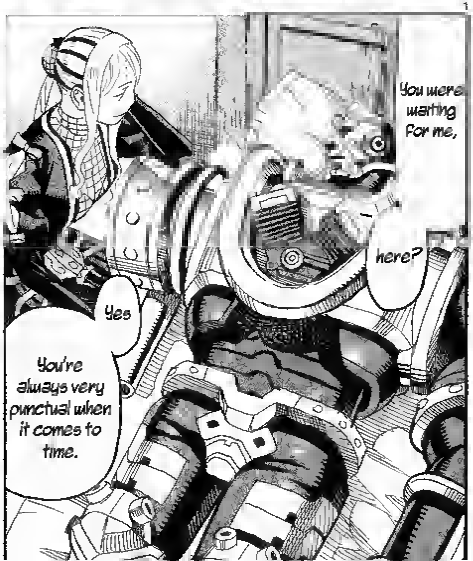

ガッ
Welcome home, Dear.
..oh

Let's go.
Breakfast is ready


You were waiting for me, here?
Yes
You're always very punctual when it comes to time.

## Chapter 15 - Group Encounter #1

Nothing
What?
So...
!
Oh,
you two are so funny
Now, let's start breakfast-
Hmmm,
I'm hungry, so I'm going to leave for a bit to eat something.
Yes but, this IS food
No, I mean real food. The kind that fills your stomach.

.....
Ah, wait-
I'll be back in 30 or so
CUTER.
Her sleeping face
Looks so... Angelic.
Well, looks like it's just the two of us.
... I've been meaning to ask
Why did you put me in your stepfarm?
What is it?
It's stepfam, not stepfarm
It's an abbreviation of step-family, in the same way that you have step-siblings.
Yeah, but why me?
Mikao had a final message for me.

She said you were a good person, who could be trusted
And that
She wanted you and I to cooperate and continue to keep the Zoo safe from harm.
So you're not Coil right now...
Yes
You're... Torque?
It was rather a surprise.
I would have thought you were a completely different person, because your name and appearance were so different the first time we met.
To be completely honest, at this point in time I can't tell if you're truly such a trustworthy person.
I just don't know...
So you want
For us to poke around at each other's intentions?
6
When
?
we spoke before,
But,
I really would like to try to understand you.
I had always wondered about what you said

You said something about abandoning your own child.
Does the scar from that still remain on your heart, today?
IF it still does, I hope you will tell me, Torque
I hope you will tell me how you've lived with it, up to this day
Huh?
...

What the HELL is this?!
...what the?
?
Hang on, what's the big idea?!
I was only logged off for a bit!
You can't change my costume like this!
8
I'm so sorry.
But I had to do this so you wouldn't struggle and fight.
If that's your reasoning,
then don't do stuff that makes me struggle!
What did I do to deserve this...
Why you...
It was YOU!
Aack!

I honestly don't think
this look suits me
Oh no,
it looks just fine on you.
Look at that,
a picture perfect family
This is going to be quite the fun photo op
What the hell are you laughing for?!
You're just making fun of us!!
Here we go
Ready?
Cheese!
What's wrong with it?
I think you look very cute.
Are we done now? Let me go!
C-C-C-Cute?
W-W-Who do you think you are, buster?!
ニパッ

I would like to talk to you about the informant within the Zoo
I am one of the new bodyguards hired to protect you.
I am Torque's partner, and my name is Crank
So?! Why should I care?!
who hired that capture squad to go after you and Mikao.
!

I would like you to trust us,
and not go blindly rampaging ahead.
How they are treated for this may affect the existence of the Zoo.
!
WHISK

By going over Mikao and Chloe's story,
I have an idea of who might be responsible.
However,
I would like you to leave the matter of punishment for the guilty party up to us.

Do I have your understanding?
.....
Losers!
I hope you all die and go to hell!!

.....
Do you think she understood?
No
I don't
Heh

Aah!
Aah!
Aah!
Aaah!
Because you're running away from us!
Why are you following after me?!
Why are you dressed like that?
What did Chloe say to you?
Get away!
Shut up shut up shut up!
Just leave me alone!
Is it true that Kabaki appeared again yesterday?
Why is Chloe doing this? She said she'd never have a stepPam again!

What happened to Grandma Mikao?
Why hasn't she come back to us?

ドゴ
!?
ドルルル

!?
Urgh.
Ung
Whoa!
Shit!
What is this?
Are you okay,
Gaur?
I'm all trapped and stuff...
Umm,
I think this was over-doing it.
15
So this was your work,
Merino.
We meet again, Sister Oear.
And besides,
such a violent sister will not behave unless she is soundly punished.
What are you saying?
It was you who called for her apprehension.
!

This disgraceful appearance suits you, Sister Dear.
Silence!
Yeah but, you're still controlling him.
You treacherous murderer!!
you make no sense
16
Treach
What?
in the act of capturing you, Sister Dear
I didn't think it was necessary to soil my own hands
This is Corriedale, my trusted manservant
This?
Who's the tank behind you?
An NPC?

According to Miss Chloe's explanation,
Kabaki appeared on Tarentella yesterday and destroyed Mikao's character.
And this would mean
that once again, every person who has ever acted as your stepfam parent has disappeared
17
!!
Merino, you shouldn't say that...
Remember how often you stuck up for Gaur in the past, saying Kabaki's actions weren't her fault..?
You be silent!
That was the past!! This is now!!
Heh. Perhaps it was for the best that I didn't join your stepfam
I don't want to be slaughtered by that monster
I'm glad, too
I never would have wanted you in my family
Ingrate...
Whu, you
.....

You're an ingrate!
Even after Mikao is gone forever,
you still haven't shed a single tear for her!
?
What did you say?
You always acted so sick of her when she was around.
And if anything ever happened, the first thing out of your mouth was die, or go to hell.
Even after Mikao told us she was sick, you still acted so put out and sulky.
Were you actually GLAD, down inside?
That another pest would be gone from your life.

19
!?
Welcome back,
Gaur.
Where am I?
Inside the Zoo?
Yes.
Torque the bodyguard brought you back here by yourself.
There weren't three others with him?
Him-self?
No?
Just him.

You came back to us
safe and sound.
I'm so glad
That you...
20
This room,
is Lize's, right?
Yes.
What about it?
What about it, she says.
Gaur, what are you...
I know what you're thinking! Too bad, what a shame!
That someone as violent and messed-up as me had to come back here!

I broke the rule not to go outside!
If you hate me, then just say so!
Tell me it's my fault that the goodbye party for Mikao was ruined!
It's all my fault to you, anyway!
If you want to punish me, eat your heart out!
Yes.
I heard about it from Torque the bodyguard.
You know what happened, then?
Everyone else is waiting,
and I have to explain what happened.
I'm going to leave now
All right.
21
...oh, right.
and also,
From Mikao afterward
Gaur...
If that's really what you think,
Maybe I should
think of some kind of discipline for you

I really am glad.
It's true.
I'm so happy to see you back here safe and sound.
If I could, I would hug you,
But I don't think
you would allow me to do that.
I know what you are.
a liar, and a hypocrite.
I'm going to leave the rest to you.

What do you want?
Good to see some life in you.
I was worried you might be sick or something when you were offline as I carried you here.
Look at you.
How can your character be fine after fighting Kebaki?
I was hit by some viruses,
but I've succeeded in cleaning them out.
Besides,
it was Mikeo who saved me.
I wasn't able to defeat Kebaki,
but it's thanks to her that I'm here now.
23
She's Lost.
I heard she was taken to the hospital immediately afterward.
You haven't heard anything from her since?
.. so,
is Grandma
I'll tell you everything, if you want.
The way she fought,
to the last instant.

All three
insisted they would join the Zoo's side,
After they handed over your avatar,
and asked for a way to contact them, should we need their help in the future.
but for now, we declined,
Why'd you do that?
Partly because we cannot fully trust them at this time.
So, what about-
Oh, the other three?
All right.
...don't contact them again
What?
Why?
I know what you're worried about
Joining up with us means making an enemy out of the rest of the online world.
...I don't want that
I don't want people to get involved,
and hurt, because of me.
24

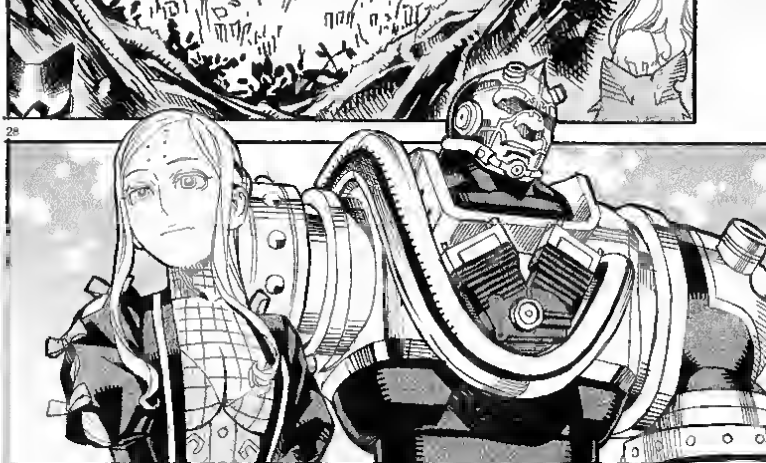
Every time,
I manage to hurt someone.
I don't want it to happen,
but somehow...
Always my fault...?
Why is it...
25
We just want to know
why she didn't.
We were all ready for Mikao's going-away party,
and she never came.
but,
We're sorry, Gaur,
Chloe's explanation of what happened was much too simple.
so we want to know what REALLY happened yesterday.
.....
...Jeah!
She can't tell you that.
Because in the end,
it was all her fault.

You all think it's true, deep down,
so why do you waste your time tiptoeing around it?!
Marino?!
Mikao left to get her back, and never returned!
She broke the rules and left on her own,
Doesn't that explain it to you? What more do you need?

And you're taking it out on us again?
Don't touch me.
um. Gaur,
Don't
touch me
What a pathetic and shameful Sister Dear

If you detest me, please come right at me.
Corriedale and I are always ready for a direct confrontation.
Oh?
Why do you glare at me so?

It's time you learned what a pathetic, weak,
useless and pointless creature you are on your own.
And how did you think you were going to fight all those enemies by yourself out there, anyways?
You can't even beat ME on your own.
I think it's about time you learned your lesson the hard way.



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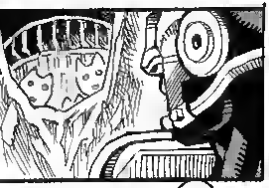
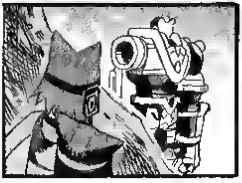
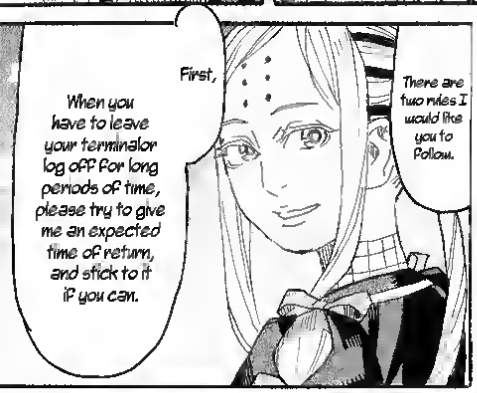
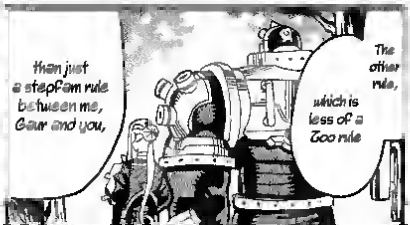




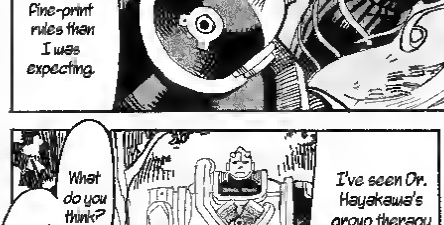

First,
When you have to leave your terminalor log off for long periods of time, please try to give me an expected time of return, and stick to it if you can.
There are two rules I would like you to follow.

You're new to them, so you're unfamiliar.
Can't help but notice,
they're all keeping their distance
But they all seem very curious.


than just a step&m rule between me, Gaur and you,
The other rule,
which is less of a 2oo rule

If you will be late or absent, you must inform the other members of the stepfam as soon as possible.
Is that twice a day, in the morning and evening,
we meet together at specified times to share a meal.

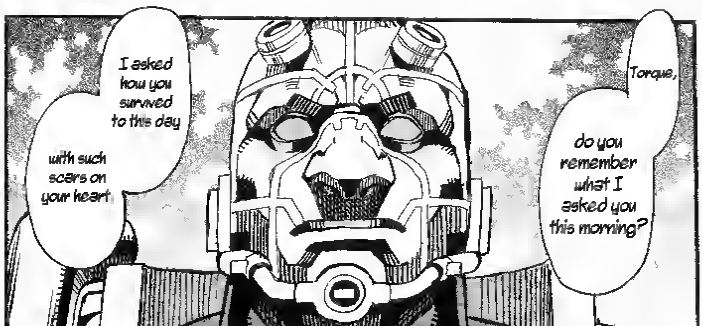
Inte-resting.
That's much fewer fine-print rules than I was expecting.
Also, I trust you will use common sense regarding things like violence, thievery and leaving the Zoo


What do you think?
What's your impression of the Zoo?
I've seen Dr. Hayakawa's group therapy methods even before the incidents
It's not a shock to me.

Since the incidents that "shocked" our society,
we've been portrayed as the base of the newest and most extreme cult yet.
Are you surprised?

Well

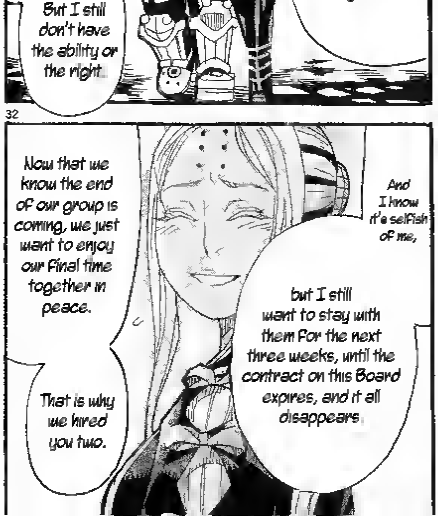
It's much more tranquil than anyone outside is imagining it to be...
It's actually quite idyllic.
Also, I've noticed a lot of child PCs.
How did it get that way?
At Dr. Hayakawa's, most of the adults were counselors or students, and they would have extended conversations and sessions with the child PCs.
Yes, currently we have 34 child PCs, while the number of adults is just 4, including me.
I feel like the step-family experiments Dr. Hayakawa was running had a higher percentage of adult PCs...
That's why
Before, the GM and I tried to care for as many children as we could just by ourselves,
all those horrible things kept happening.
but I think that was pushing it. It didn't make for good therapy.
.....


Torque,
do you remember what I asked you this morning?
I asked how you survived to this day with such scars on your heart.

After it all happened, I didn't want to be a counselor, didn't want to be anyone's step-family anymore.
It's a terrible thing to say, when there are still children at the Zoo who need help,
But I still don't have the ability or the right.

It WAS a very rude question.
I understand why you didn't respond to it at the time.
But still, I wanted to know
I'm living here just like you, with horrible scars and the burden of a great crime over my head.

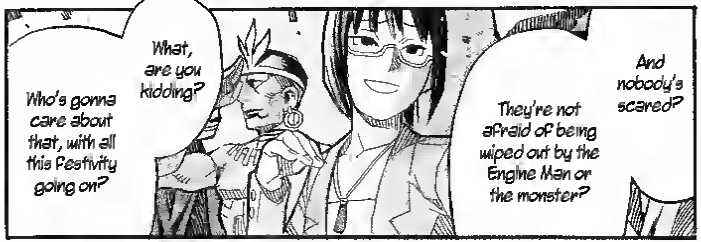



Now that we know the end of our group is coming, we just want to enjoy our final time together in peace.
That is why we hired you two.
And I know it's selfish of me,
but I still want to stay with them for the next three weeks, until the contract on this Board expires, and it all disappears.

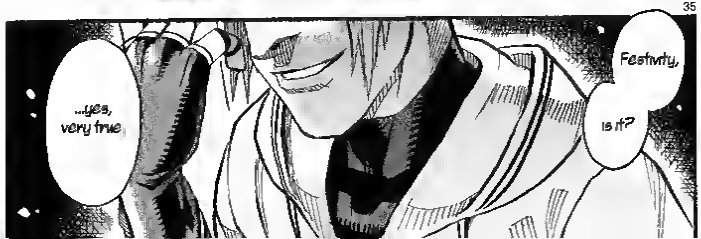
So then,
why is
Gaur in your step-family?
I often wonder
about why I was born,
and what I will leave behind after I've died.
If there's nothing I have to leave, then it will mean I might as well have never existed
33
She was the only true friend
my daughter ever had
but I want to see her
smile from deep within, just one more time
Whether it's one of the few shards of hope I have left, or just my own selfish desire, I'm not sure,

ゴオオオオオ
34
Wow,
when you get three or four burning all at once,
It's really one hell of a sight
Why don't we burn out the whole forest, then?
Because recognizably destroying them one by one makes it easier for the different groups to report their progress

I see
You know, it feels like the number of groups burning forests today is higher than usual
Because of what happened yesterday, right?
People were going crazy, saying one of the beasts showed up, the Engine Man showed up, some monster showed up. All sorts of stuff.
So burning them out like this is the best way to smoke out those vicious beasts.
Plus, there are rumors they move their hideout from forest to forest

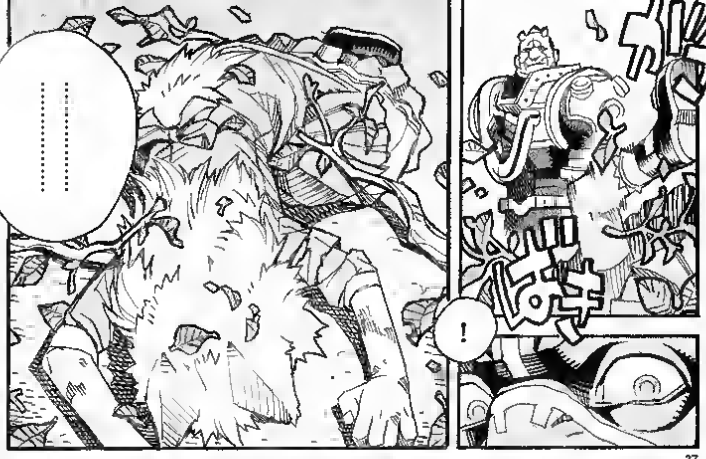

What, are you kidding?
Who's gonna care about that, with all this festivity going on?
They're not afraid of being wiped out by the Engine Man or the monster?
And nobody's scared?



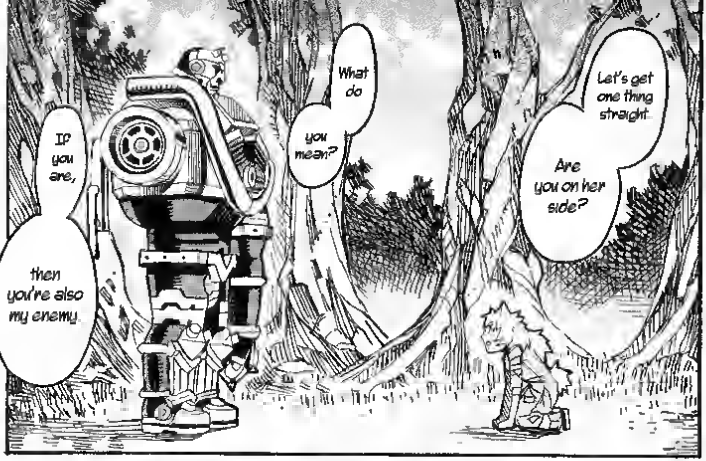

...yes, very true.
Festivity, is it?

In that case,
I'll have to watch this to the end
Even if being within the flames
should burn me to a crisp
Crank.
Where are you right now?
Recon?
Listen,
you left me all alone here in the Zoo, and now I'm being made into a whipping boy..

What do you think you're doing?
Get down here, Gear


.....
!

...what's going on?
Why are you hurt?
Ouch.
but,
why do you ask?
Yes, I was,
None of your beeswax.
weren't you with HER all day?
Besides,
.....


Let's get one thing straight.
Are you on her side?
What do you mean?
If you are,
then you're also my enemy

You can pick me, or her.
Choose
Now

what?
If you're still in that shape after using healing herbs,
you must have been on the verge of death

No.
I'll ask again. What do you mean?

Forget it!
You're my enemy after all!!
ドギッ
Wait, you're hurt
……

You're already my enemy
I don't have to tell you.
Who in the Zoo is capable of doing this to you?
Who was it?
Tell me..
Forget it!
I don't want anything to do with you.
Listen
Oh
One last thing
What?
You guys can be all "leave it to us," but you can butt out for all I care
I don't trust you in the slightest

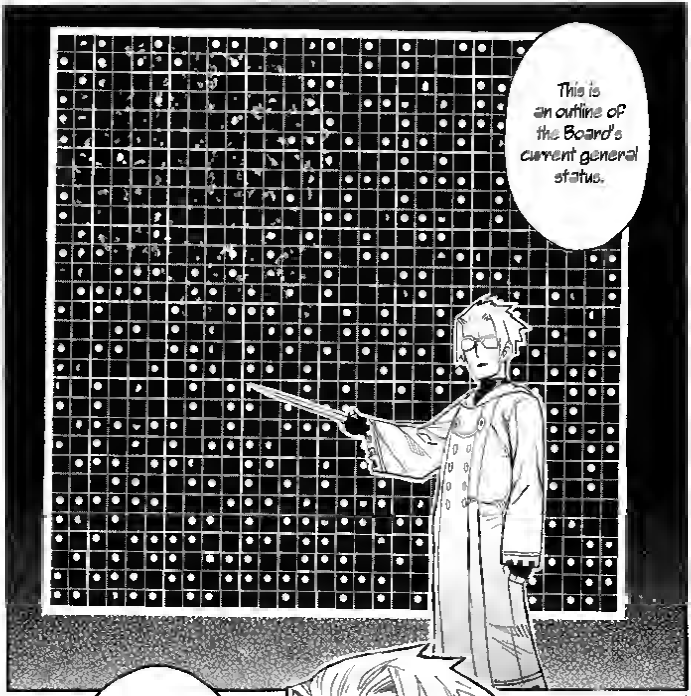
I'm going to destroy the backstabber
with my OWN hands.

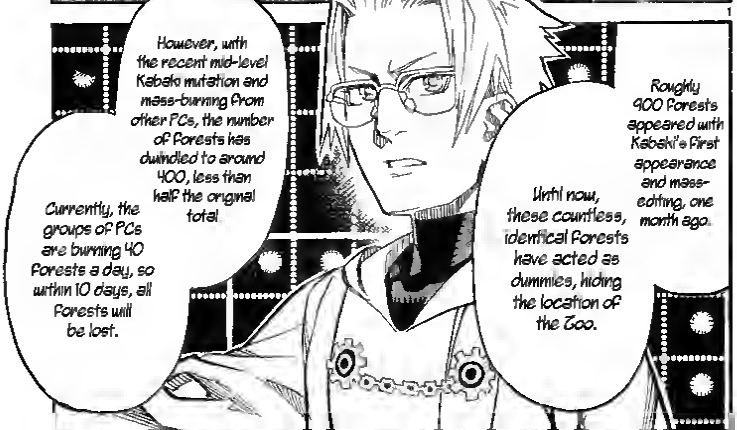
Heh

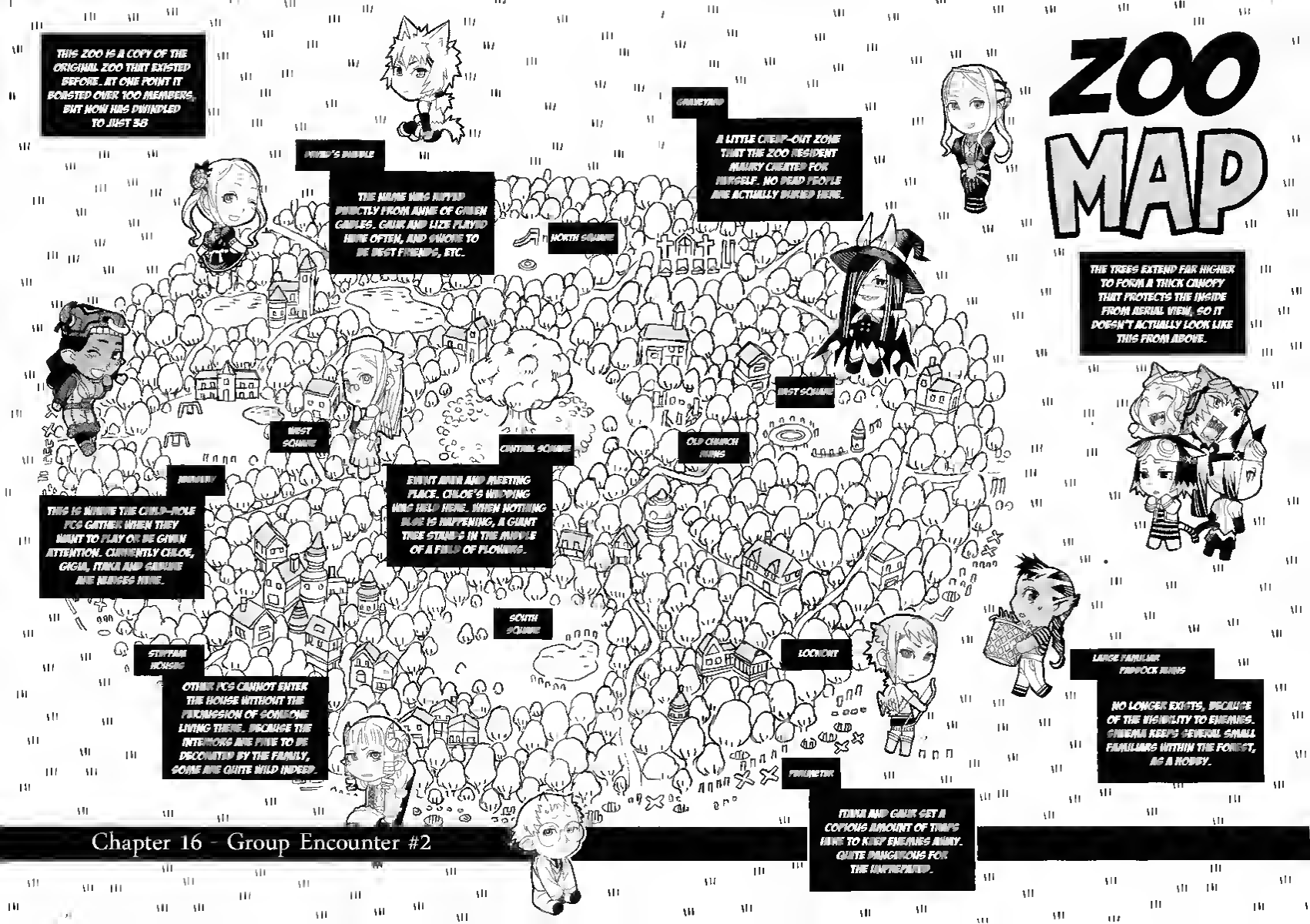
How many days it'll take to find the beasts' nest.
On what?
?
So, by the way, wanna make a bet?

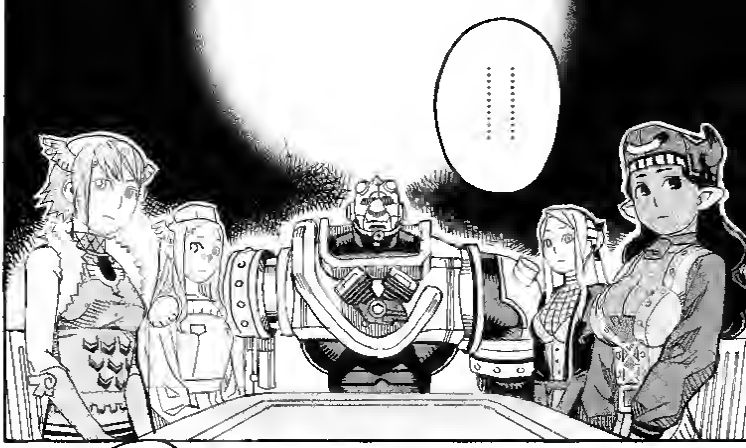
.....!
So, at this rate it can't take TOO long to smoke them out.
We've burned down 30 forests just today.

It'll take 10 more days at the most,
to burn every single Forest on the Board.


This is an outline of the Board's current general status.


Roughly 900 Forests appeared with Kebaki's first appearance and mass-editing, one month ago.
Until now, these countless, identical Forests have acted as dummies, hiding the location of the Zoo.
However, with the recent mid-level Kebaki mutation and mass-burning from other PCs, the number of Forests has dwindled to around 400, less than half the original total.
Currently, the groups of PCs are burning 40 Forests a day, so within 10 days, all Forests will be lost.


ZOO MAP
THIS ZOO IS A COPY OF THE ORIGINAL ZOO THAT EXISTED BEFORE. AT ONE POINT IT BOASTED OVER 100 MEMBERS, BUT NOW HAS DWINDLED TO JUST 38
GRAVEYARD
A LITTLE CREEP-OUT ZONE THAT THE ZOO RESIDENT MAURY CREATED FOR HIMSELF. NO DEAD PEOPLE ARE ACTUALLY BURIED HERE.
NINA'S PADDLE
THE NAME NINA RIPPED DIRECTLY FROM ANNE OF GREEN GABLES. GAUK AND LIZE FLOYD KNOW OFTEN, AND SMOKE TO BE BEST FRIENDS, ETC.
NORTH SQUARE
THE TREES EXTEND FAR HIGHER TO FORM A THICK CANOPY THAT PROTECTS THE INSIDE FROM AERIAL VIEW, SO IT DOESN'T ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE THIS FROM ABOVE.
EAST SQUARE
WEST SQUARE
CENTRAL SQUARE
OLD CHURCH RUINS
NURSERY
THIS IS WHERE THE CHILD-ROLE PCS GATHER WHEN THEY WANT TO PLAY OR BE GIVEN ATTENTION. CURRENTLY CHLOE, GIGIA, ITAKA AND GAUKE ARE MEMBERS HERE.
EVENT AREA AND MEETING PLACE. CHLOE'S WEDDING WAS HELD HERE. WHEN NOTHING ELSE IS HAPPENING, A GIANT TREE STANDS IN THE MIDDLE OF A FIELD OF FLOWERS.
SOUTH SQUARE
STUFFAM HOUSING
OTHER PCS CANNOT ENTER THE HOUSE WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF SOMEONE LIVING THERE. BECAUSE THE INTERIORS ARE FINE TO BE DECORATED BY THE FAMILY, SOME ARE QUITE WILD INDEED.
LOCKOUT
LARGE FAMILIAR PADDOCK RUINS
NO LONGER EXISTS, BECAUSE OF THE VISIBILITY TO ENEMIES. GWENDA KEEPS SEVERAL SMALL FAMILIARS WITHIN THE FOREST, AS A HOBBY.
PERIMETER
ITAKA AND GAUK GET A COPIOUS AMOUNT OF TIMES HAVE TO KEEP ENEMIES AWAY. QUITE DANGEROUS FOR THE UNPREPARED.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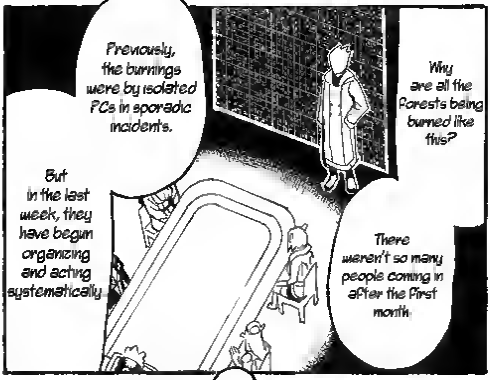
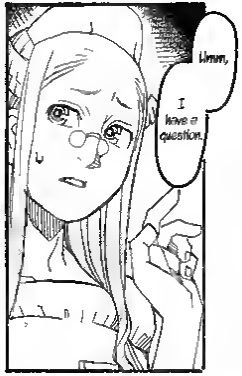
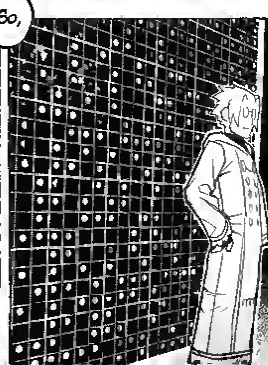
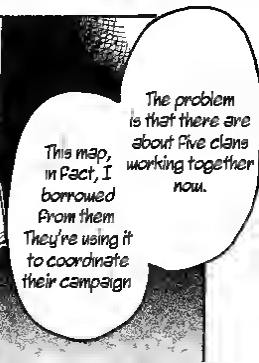

Why are all the Forests being burned like this?
Previously, the burnings were by isolated PCs in sporadic incidents.
But in the last week, they have begun organizing and acting systematically
There weren't so many people coming in after the first month


Umm,
I have a question.

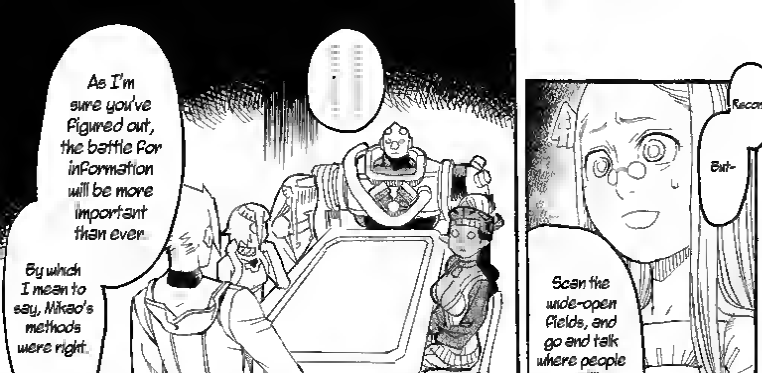
So,
which location is our Forest?
I don't quite recognize the layout




The problem is that there are about Five clans working together now.
This map, in fact, I borrowed from them They're using it to coordinate their campaign

Ohh.
This is us, right here.
As a matter of fact, much of this map is highly incorrect.
I spread plenty of misinformation when I made contact with them.
But that one's burned out.
Oh, how wonderful!
You're so handy to have around, Crank!
5
True, we had a special ace up our sleeves in Torque,
But he can't fight 24 hours nonstop.
And if they find the Zoo, they'll come in endless waves, relieving and switching places with each other.
If it comes down to an actual battle, we stand no chance of winning.
On the other hand, this is about the extent of what we can manage.
What we must do is anything we can to prevent the Zoo from being discovered.

At present, I've been provided with three ideas.
(1) Move the Zoo from Forest to Forest, evading discovery
(2) Plant new Forests where the enemy has burned them
(3) Strike out and kill all PCs burning Forests.
(1) doesn't change the fact that Forests are still being burned, and (2) will be nearly impossible for us without GM privileges
And killing all the hostiles as in (3) is also impossible,
not least of which because it sends an unmistakable signal that we are still here on this Board, drawing down more PCs from outside.
So, we have no plan
We just hide here and wait for them to find us.
Um, is there anything we can do?
Don't worry.
I have a 4th plan of my own.
However, it will require a full 2-3 days of preparation first.
Yes, in fact I want you to assist in the reconnaissance of outside PCs.
6


As I'm sure you've figured out, the battle for information will be more important than ever.
By which I mean to say, Mikao's methods were right.
Recon?
But-
Scan the wide-open fields, and go and talk where people are milling around

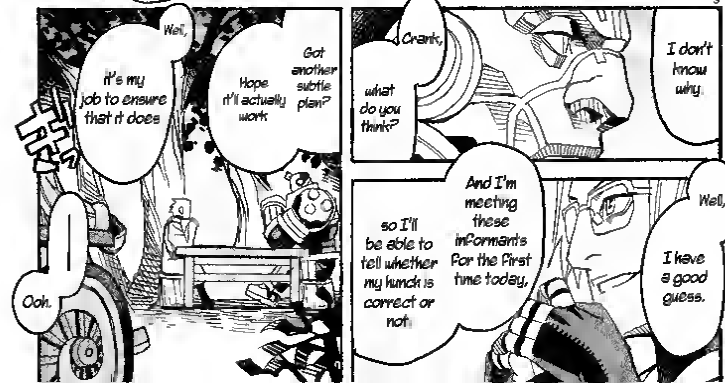
Maintaining these two advantages are what will keep us safe from our enemies.
I want you all to act with these points in mind.
Our present advantages are that the enemy doesn't know where we are,
nor are they positive that we are even hiding on the Board.

The one complete and total wild card in my plan
is the utterly irrational behavior of that young girl
...so,
how does she look?

Good
She seems to be taken with you, then.
She told me to decide whether I was her enemy or her ally.
I'm not really sure.
Uh, What?
Can't you see her meaning?
She WANTS you to be on her side.
So I assume
you gave her the answer she wanted?
She said being on her side made me Chloe's enemy
Do you think I could just say anything on the spot?
Look,
how many times do I have to tell you, I can't just play with people's minds like you do.
It didn't demand that you ACTUALLY do that.
All you had to do was tell her what would make her happy.
Forget it
More importantly,
There was one very big problem you didn't discuss at your battle of information meeting

If someone here leaks information like the existence and location of the Zoo to others outside.
And it's virtually proven that someone here is betraying us.
About an informant.
Which is?
So,
if this informant has been capable all along of bringing ruin onto the Zoo,
why haven't they done so yet?
True.
Our existence here entirely depends on that person's discretion.




Well,
it's my job to ensure that it does
Got another subtle plan?
Hope it'll actually work.
Ooh.
Crank,
what do you think?
I don't know why.
Well,
I have a good guess.
And I'm meeting these informants for the first time today,
so I'll be able to tell whether my hunch is correct or not.

Here I am to see our two new bodyguards together in the same place.
But,
I can't say I'm very impressed
10
They look like Jack Sprat and his wife.
Well, for the money we're paying them,
Are they really so great?
they'd better be

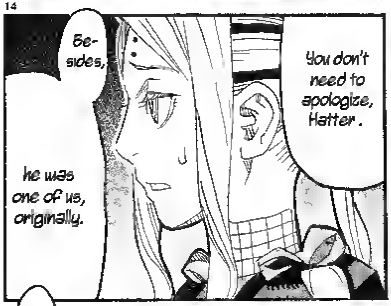
We raised 500,000 yen to hire you two,
and 300,000 of that came from ME.
Which would make me your principal client. Are you aware of that?
Therefore, you have a responsibility to report your actions to me as well as Chloe, and ..
11
Tongue ..?
Hmm?
And you are—
My name is Merino!!
You two! Are you listening?!
Merino, of course.
That must be–
Oh...
!
.....

Why do you use a wheelchair on the Board? Surely it has no meaning here...
What I do is none of your business.
What a RUDE man.
And you! The big one!
?
!?

Grr.
Well,
At any rate, I must be shown results in the next few days
I had heard the big one was supposed to be FRIGHTFULLY strong.
Apparently, what I heard was wrong
Otherwise,
I will be forced to pressure Chloe to cancel your contract.
13
If you waste our time doing nothing at all,
you'll be no different that those useless layabouts.
And I will be MOST disappointed if that should be the case.
So does that mean
that,
Mitsuki won't be attending today's meeting, after all?

By piecing together what our people are saying,
I'd guess he's off being involved in some event somewhere.
Yes.
I keep trying and failing to get in contact with him.




Besides,
he was one of us, originally.
You don't need to apologize, Hatter.

I'm really sorry about this
He's the leader of our clan,
but he doesn't seem to understand that, sometimes.

Hm.
I can't imagine
What was he like, back then?
He wasn't always like that.

Chloe,
umm,
?
That,
That, uh, photo..?
Oh!
It's nothing!
Dust
!
?
Anyways,
about this upcoming meeting
Does that mean
today's will be cancelled?
I'm sorry this is all coming up so suddenly.
No,
we're volunteers in this case, so we don't have any reason to complain.
No
Of the clan's 28 members, 22 will be present today, so it should be fine.
And to be honest, it'll be easier to discuss without him here.
Ha ha.

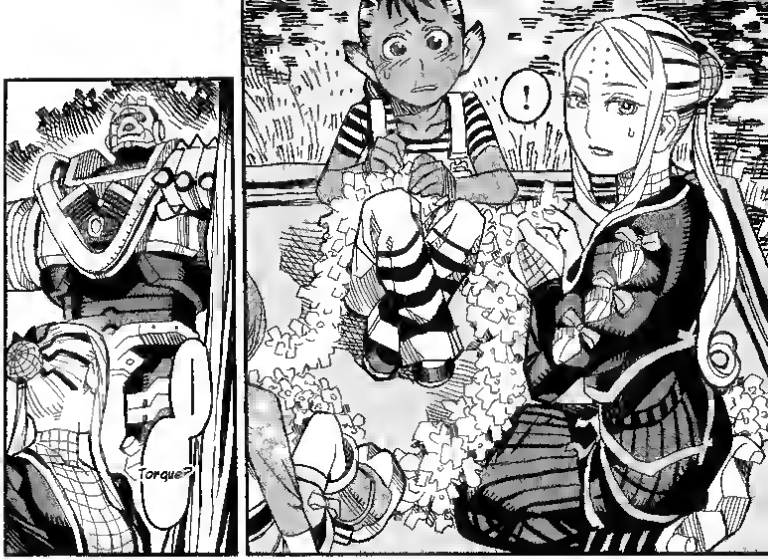
Well then,
I'll be looking forward to meeting your new bodyguards for the first time at today's meeting.
We'll both be here for the same purpose of protecting the Zoo.
Hopefully they'll get along well with our members.

……

Stop horsing around!
Why, Hey! you-!
Ugh
Oof
You're gonna!
Eek!
No, stop!
Don't!
Don't pull my skirt!
Would you knock it off!
Oooh, I'm going to...
You girls!
17

Oh
Heya
Is that chick with the big cans here today?
All you care about is tits.
What's wrong with the view right now?

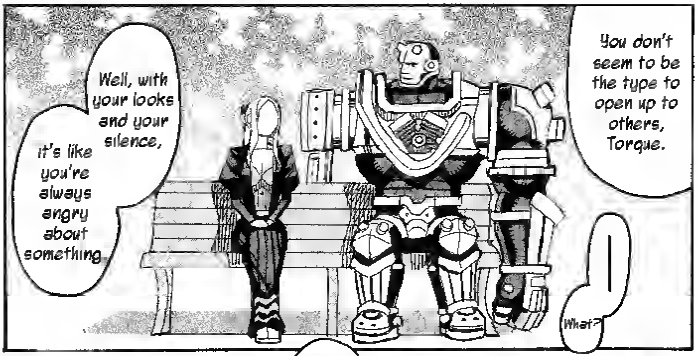
Ah!
God, I love those stupid reactions
Hey, something's odd with her
Take it easy, she's "sick," man
You know what these people are like
What? Are you trembling?
!
What's up with you guys?
NetPags? What, you don't know?
Everyone aside from that one idiot is the same sex as their avatar. They're ALL girls.
You really think it's fun flirting with these NetPags?
For real?
Dayumn, it's like a harem.
That cheeky little murdering GM.
He musta had some sweet things going on here.
It's no wonder, with a freakin' paradise like this.
I can see why the guy was so obsessed with this place.


Torque?
!

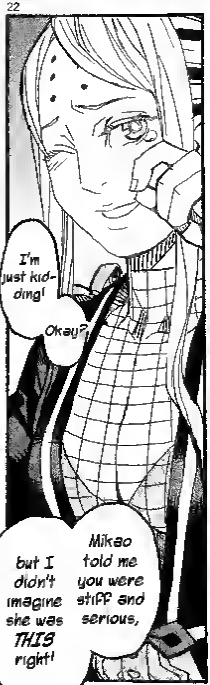
I want
to ask you something.

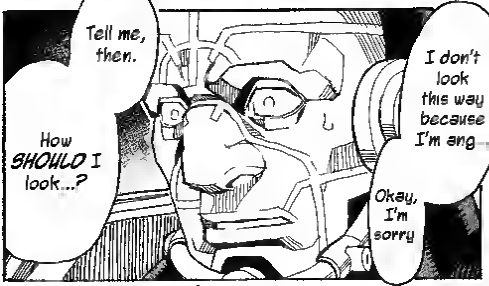
Merino?
No,
I've never heard that her legs are that way in real life.
I suppose she has her own reasons that only she would understand.
I see.
One day, she just started sitting in a wheelchair, and despite all the times we asked her, she never told the reason to anyone.

Hmm,
strange...
What is?
For you to come to me,
asking about the Zoo and other people here
Still, that makes you different from the others.
Anyone else who visits us in the Zoo wants to ask about us personally and dig into our secrets
Well, I have heard
the minimum amount of necessary info from Crank.
Plus,
you always seem so grumpy and short with me.
It made me wonder,
because it sure seemed like you had absolutely no interest in us.
Dr Hayakawa told me,
a counselor's job is to listen to people,
but that a counselor must speak naturally with his client based on the client's attitude,
and not simply question them.


You don't seem to be the type to open up to others, Torque.
What?
Well, with your looks and your silence,
it's like you're always angry about something.

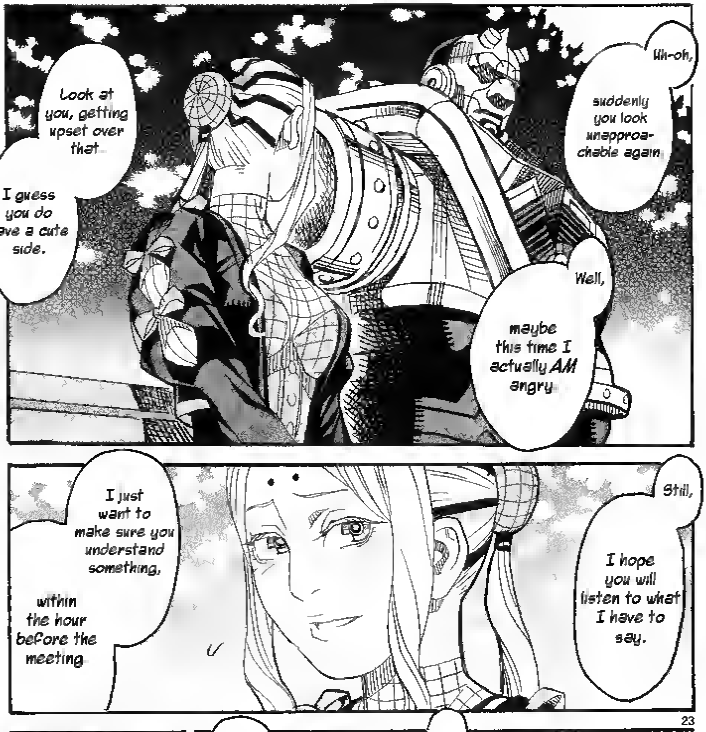



I'm just kidding!
Okay?
but I didn't imagine she was THIS right!
Mikao told me you were stiff and serious,


Tell me, then.
How SHOULD I look...?
I don't look this way because I'm ang...
Okay, I'm sorry

...

Ha ha.
Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha!


Look at you, getting upset over that.
I guess you do have a cute side.
Uh-oh, suddenly you look unapproachable again.
Well, maybe this time I actually AM angry.
I just want to make sure you understand something,
within the hour before the meeting
Still, I hope you will listen to what I have to say.

Even though it's practically confirmed that they're the betrayer's liason.
Tricky situation you've got here.
I understand.
I want you to be friendly with them. No provocations.
Yes.
I heard from Crank.
I think I get the idea.
My first meeting with the mercenaries stationed within the Zoo?

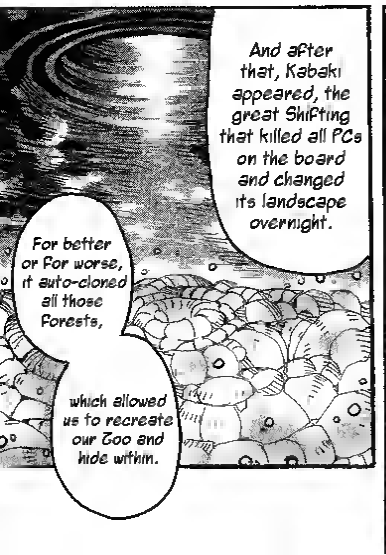
Stop...
Um, wait!
Eek!
Don't move, now
If you start lurching around,
I might actually HIT you.
We're just keeping you company, playing with you.
Besides, we bodyguards DO have to keep our skills honed. It's our job.
But...
Umm.
I didn't ask you to...
Eek!

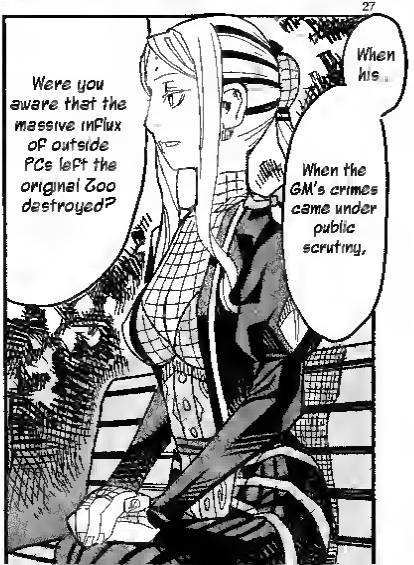
The GM of this Board is the former head of the Zoo, and the murdering kid from Urawa, right?
Around here, you called him Doctor, or Father.
Huh?
Now, here's the question.
26
It was all just a little pretend thing for your little game.
Of course, he was a 17-year-old kid, so he couldn't get married for real
And if the current head, Chloe, is called Mother, does that mean they were married?
So, look at you all, still hangin' out around here.
"yes"?
Heh, just talk to Mitsuki, and he'll tell you.
For real?
Man, I don't even think the media knows about that.
Urr.
Well...
Umm, that's-
And what's with that Chloe, anyway?

She was living with that freakin' murderer online, and she doesn't care in the least.
Four of the seven people who have died because of him were members here, right?
And you're still just hangin' out, continuing your fun little game?
26
What is that, like those cultists who never snap out of it?
Or could it be that Chloe and the rest of you are all in on the murders?
No!
We didn't, we never
!?
You never,
what?
I mean...
Let's hear the rest, then
You've gotta get along with us, right?

Nuh.
Noo
ooo.




And after that, Kabaki appeared, the great Shifting that killed all PCs on the board and changed its landscape overnight.
For better or for worse, it auto-cloned all those Forests,
which allowed us to recreate our Zoo and hide within.


Were you aware that the massive influx of outside PCs left the original Zoo destroyed?
When his...
When the GM's crimes came under public scrutiny,

I wrote e-mails to everyone, to inform them.
Naturally, From the people who were still in the Zoo just prior to the Shifting,
to all of the others who had drifted away previously and we all missed.
I was really excited.
I thought it would be like a class reunion
But one of the things about reunions,
is they're supposed to make you long for the past, but also realise how different the present is now.
Mitsuki was one of the Zoo members who left first.
He just showed up again leading a band of mercenaries, without a word of warning.
He said we would need numbers like this, now that people could attack at any time.
And he's not at all like he used to be.

But it's not as if they've done nothing within the Zoo itself.
They harass the children and adults,
and bug us about what happened here in the past.
However, despite having several of their members stationed in the Zoo at all times,
they have never fought in battle for our sake. Not once.
And ironically, that's the right thing to do, in our case.
Crank is right
Nothing proactive we can do now will help. We have to lie in wait.
There's really no difference between them and all the people outside who want to burn us out of the forest.
The only thing
is that they're already inside.

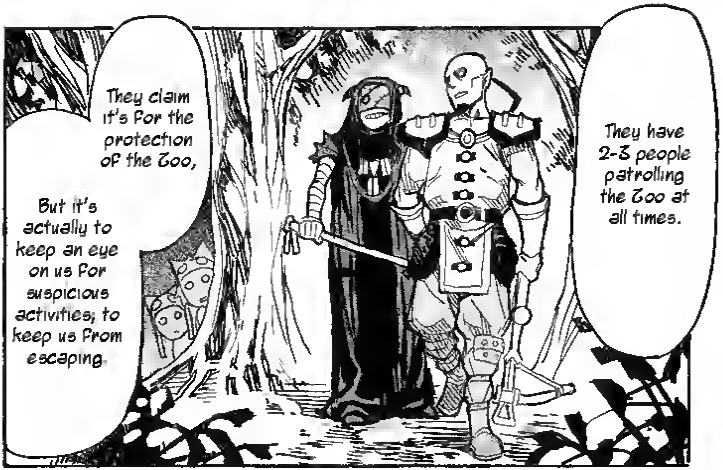
30
Grr.
Gaur?!
Dammit!

Ah!
mk

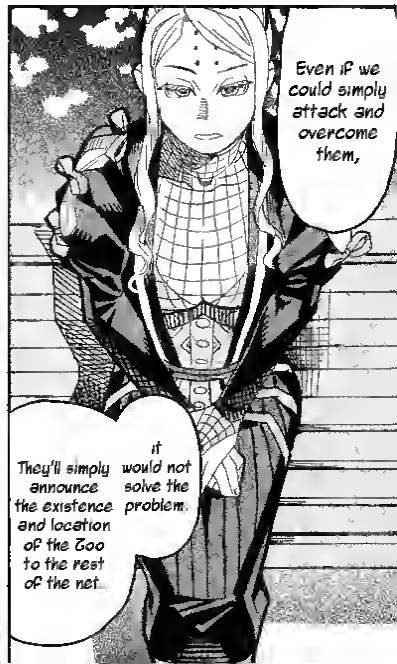
!!
.....
32
Get out of here, Geeko!!
!
Gaur?!
I'll take care of these creeps! All of them!
I want you to get out of here and save your own skin!
Aaaaaahh!!

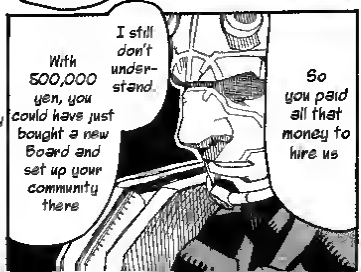
Aside from myself, Itaka, Gigia and the other Zoo members, the only ones who knew they had left
were two of the mercenaries
Consider that Gaur and Mikao were set upon by that capturing cabal as soon as they left, as if they had been waiting for them.

But with all that they know,
You can't escape them, or kick them out.
When the mercenaries first came,
Gaur and Mikao were the first ones to provoke them, out of the Zoo members.
But I think it's less likely that it was those two specifically,
than the entire squad working together to pass on information


They claim it's for the protection of the Zoo,
But it's actually to keep an eye on us for suspicious activities, to keep us from escaping.
They have 2-3 people patrolling the Zoo at all times.

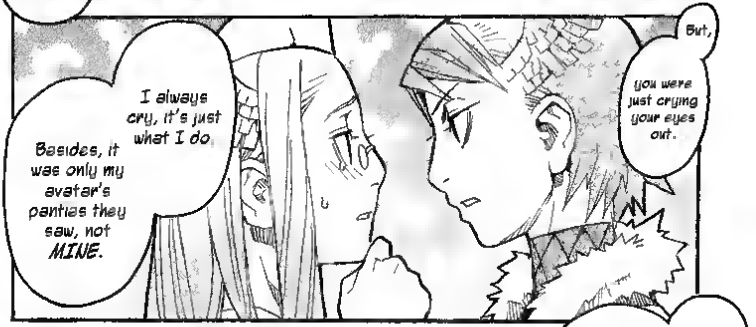
but recently there's been a subtle shift in the power structure, and they're becoming more violent.
They do maintain their bodyguard status officially,
We needed a strength of our own to resist this change in attitude.


Even if we could simply attack and overcome them,
it would not solve the problem.
They'll simply announce the existence and location of the Zoo to the rest of the net.

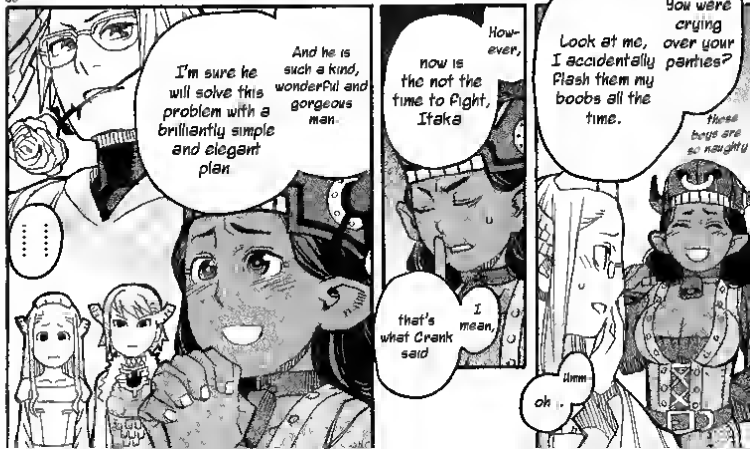

I still don't understand.
With 500,000 yen, you could have just bought a new Board and set up your community there
So you paid all that money to hire us
Not that it's really my business

Are you familiar with "group encounter," Torque?
No.
It's a method of therapy
A group healing kind of thing
By speaking our thoughts in a group and cooperating to achieve a shared goal,
we can all grow as human beings.
35
True, perhaps we've arrived at this situation by running and hiding from everything
That's why I think
if we continue to run in the future, we'll never change.
We all made a decision.
We decided that we wanted to protect this, our place, until the end.
And if we were able to achieve that,
maybe we would be capable of changing ourselves just a bit

Huh?
What happened?
Oh!
Itaka swears she's going to teach those mercenaries a lesson.
Gigia, help me stop her!
I'm just fine!
I don't mind.
Don't do it, please!
No...


I always cry, it's just what I do.
Besides, it was only my avatar's panties they saw, not MINE.
But, you were just crying your eyes out.

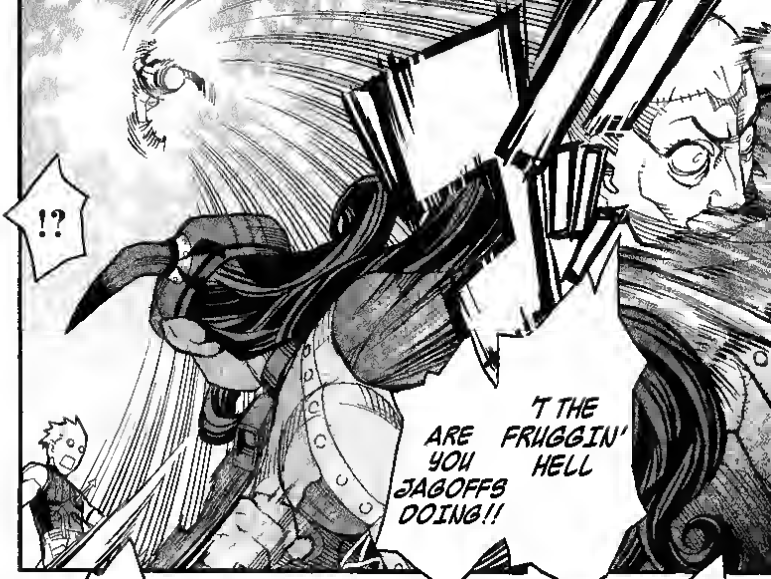



I'm sure he will solve this problem with a brilliantly simple and elegant plan.
And he is such a kind, wonderful and gorgeous man.
.....
However, now is the not the time to fight, Itaka
I mean, that's what Crank said
You were crying over your panties?
Look at me, I accidentally flash them my boobs all the time.
these boys are so naughty
Umm oh .

Well, I don't like him.
He's a slimeball.
What?How dare you criticize him!
Guess what? I don't CARE if you hate him!
Um, please don't fight.
37
Are you okay?
Um, what happened?
Then Gaur saved me,
they threw knives at me
I can't move
And she's alone with the guards
Geeko!
!?
Oh no!
Oh!
Wait!
Gaburo!
You stay with Geeko!
You can't do this!
Settle down, Itaka!

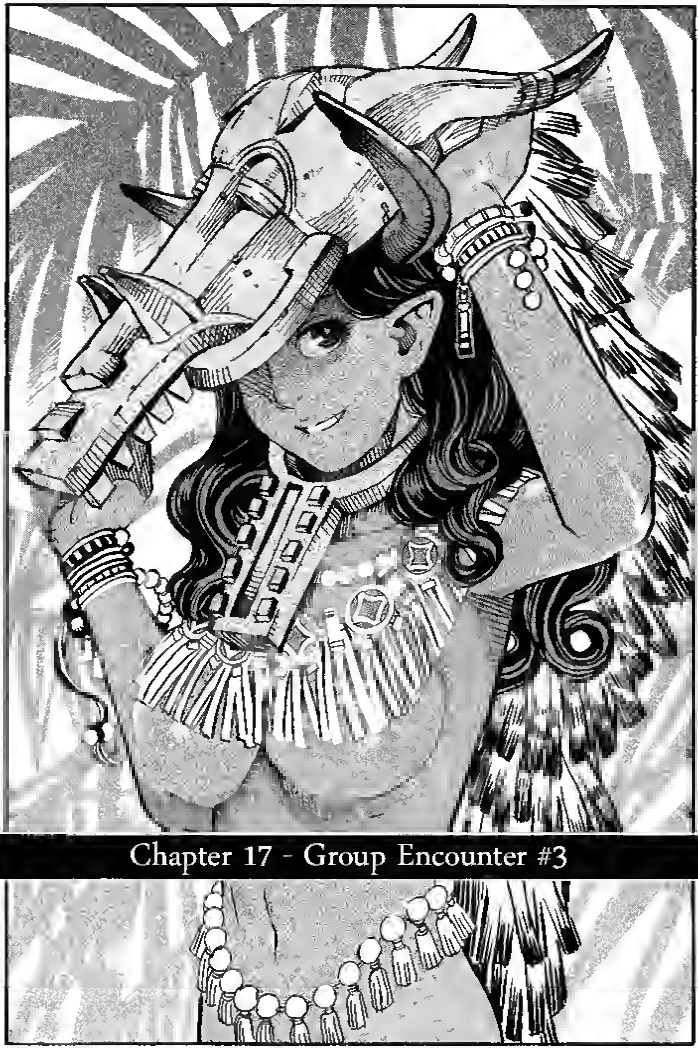
Heh.
Oh no.
She's gone and done it.
No, Iteka, I said no!

Hm?
Yuuu
sluggzz.
you...

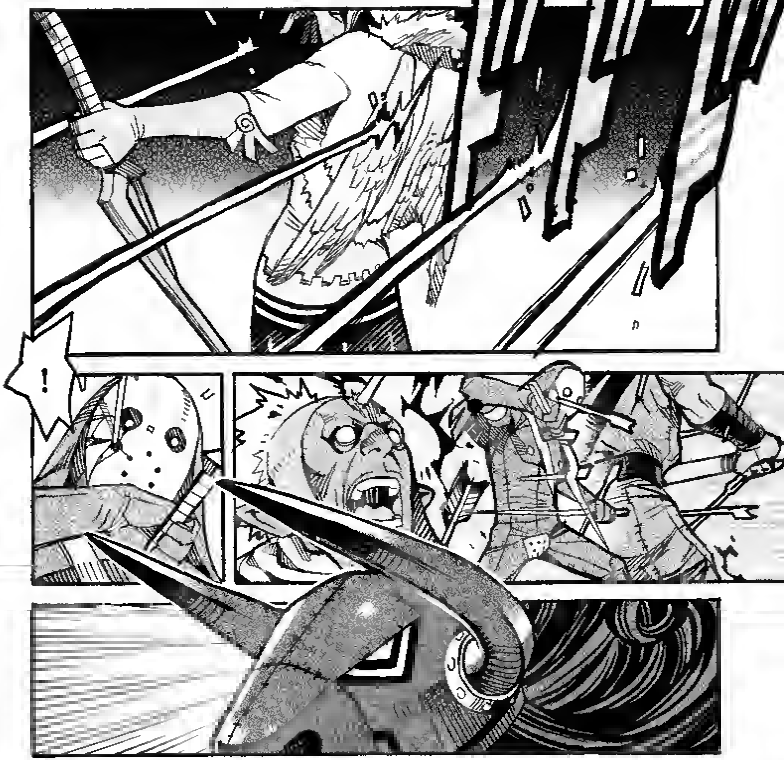

!?
'T THE FRUGGIN' HELL ARE YOU JAGOFFS DOING!!

Summon the entire group!
Now!
Shit!
What are they doing?!

Kill alla these FREAKS!!
We're gonna



# Chapter 17 - Group Encounter #3



Shh-
SHAAAAAA!!
4
TOK
TOK
TOK
TOK
TOK
!?

Argh.
Aah!
Agh.
.....

No one move.
Now you're all out of instant-revive amulets.
Hmph
Under-stand?
I can kill you, all of you, anytime I like.
Grr!
.....

What's that?!
!?
I think I've seen that before somewhere
Your arm!
Wait a minut!
!
Fil-thy-
bas-tards.
Hurricane Liver!
Wait, no!
Hey, stop
That's a rip-off!!
They're strong
Itake, of course
but also the usually-placid Gigla
he earned that
meh,
never mind
.....

sprawled out,
totally weak and helpless?
why am I always
Even the snotty, bratty Merino
Yet,
Why?
Gaur
I am truly pathetic.
I am.

This is close as I can get
Any more,
and those hawk's eyes will see through my stealth cloak
Gaur?
Why aren't you moving?
You aren't dead, are you?
!

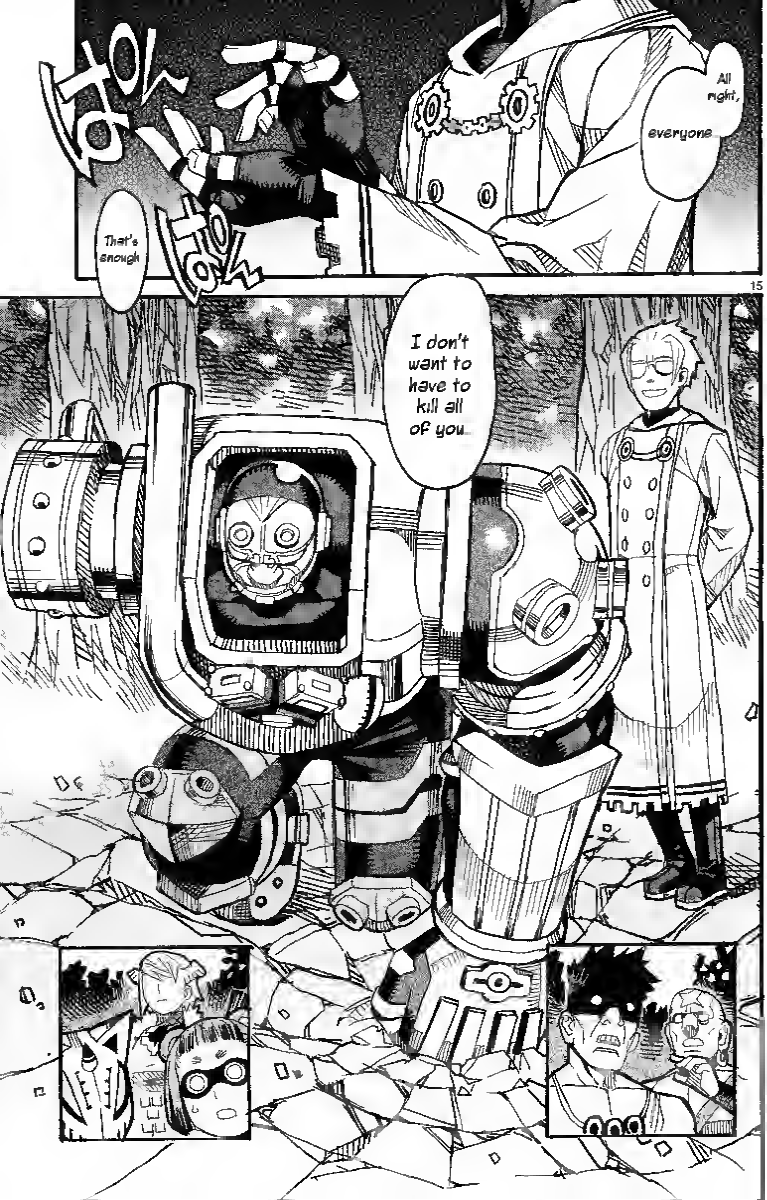
!?
Boo

!?
AAAA-AAAAA-AAHH!

!?
!!
!
Agh!
!
Wha-?!
!?
Our stealth skills were broken!
What now?
There's only one thing left to do!
Uphold our pride with some combat!

Crush the whole
lot of them!!
Halt right where you stand, combatants!!
!?

Kuzuncha?!
Koncha?
Kukeke kekekeke.
Honor-bound we are to assist in the battle!
Many against few is a tactic of the cowardly!
Stop!
Wait

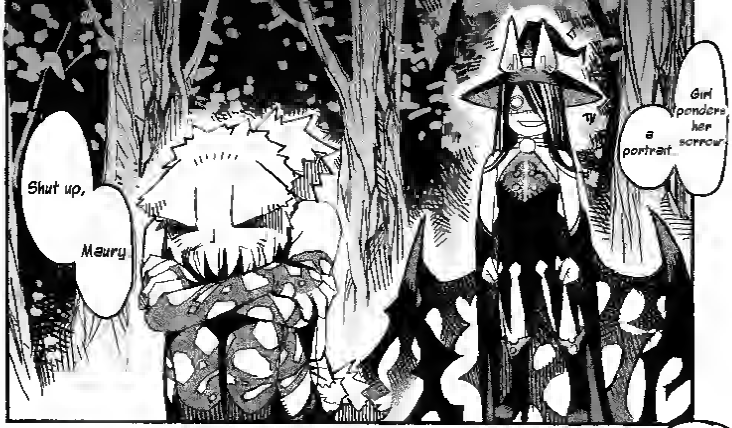

All right, everyone
That's enough
15
I don't want to have to kill all of you...

CLICK
16
Whaaat...
Engine sound?
Huh?!
Correct
It's that thing, you know!
The guy who caused such an uproar yesterday!
The Engine Man! Remember?!
Several hundred people disappeared yesterday! It blew up 1/8 of the Board!
Who?
For anyone unfamiliar with the story, I do have a video file with a selection of his battle scenes for you to browse

Oh dear, Missah Crank!
I'm evah so ash-amed!!
Do you mind?
I think that's enough.
You gudda pay da price fer mezzin' wid my Gaur!
Umm
Ms Gigia?
Givvid a Friggin' rest, ya goldurn bastards!
Now then,
My name is Crank, and I have been recently hired as a new bodyguard here.
This is my partner, Torque, who will also be a guard.
Pleased to make your acquaintance.
17
!
Umm, Gaur?
.....

Oh-
Wait!
.....
Are you okay?
You look simply terrible.
We must heal you up right away.
Come.
Well,
she is at a tricky age in her life.
.....
What's going on?
!
I heard a commotion.
Hatter?
What has happened here?
I want an explanation.
Hmm
!

Works for me
I'm guessing you must be the leader.
Well,
Do you think we might have a congenial discussion between us?
After all, that's what the original plan was
take a hint
Buzz off.
kekeke
kekeke
I feel as though my considerable talents have all but been wasted in that case.
Um, Does this mean the battle has ceased?


Girl ponders her sorrow.
a portrait
Shut up, Maury.

On background: heeheeheeheehee
What do you WANT?
You just came here so you could laugh at me.
Use this, for a quick healing effect field
You ought to heal those wounds
cerd-board?

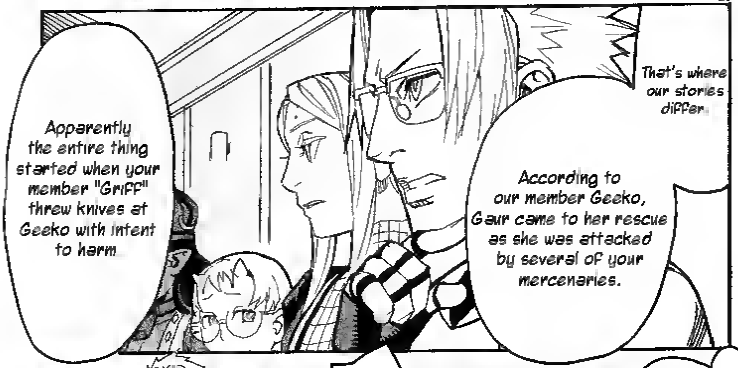
What do you WANT?
Go awa
Over here, Gaur.
Deer!

What's wrong with you?
You look like you've been crying.
What do you want?
I told you, you're my enemy now
!
.....
21

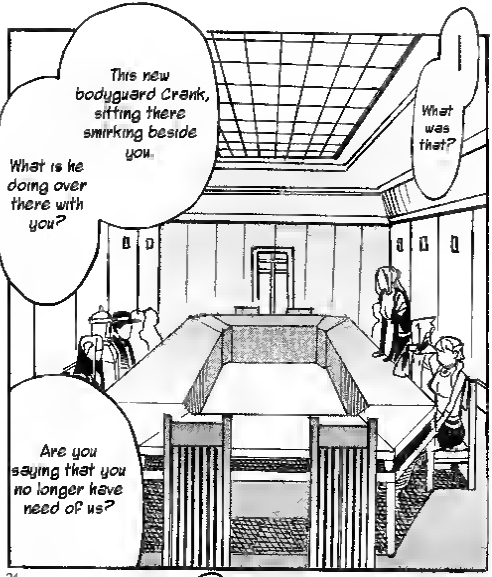
I heard you fought six mercenaries on your own.
Now that I think on it,
you've always been hurt and beat up.
Well,
I can't deny that.
Shut up.
None of your business.
Besides,
I bet you're just getting along fine with HER some more.
22
!?
What, really?!
Stupid dork, falling for her wiles! Dork dork DORK!!
I don't want to talk to you.
Leave me alone.
Umm but...
You know-
Why don't you join the others or something?
What are they doing now?
Arguing and calling it a "discussion." I can't stand that stuff.
?
What?
Nothing.
Forget I said it.
I need a home, someone please take me
I don't think she's noticed

it would seem that this whole situation
was started by one "Gaur," who is part of your group, I understand.
By compiling everything my people are saying,

23


Apparently the entire thing started when your member "GriFF" threw knives at Geeko with intent to harm.
That's where our stories differ.
According to our member Geeko, Gaur came to her rescue as she was attacked by several of your mercenaries.

.....
What a terrible thing to say!
I assure you that Geeko doesn't find this as funny as you seem to.
Incorrect.
GriFF was only practicing his knife-throwing. He had no intention of hitting anyone.


What was that?
This new bodyguard Crank, sitting there smirking beside you.
What is he doing over there with you?
Are you saying that you no longer have need of us?

Well, if today's theme is getting everything out into the open,
Chloe,
I have to admit that we're having trouble trusting you right now.

Well, that was necessary in order to rescue Gaur and Mikao...
Surely there could have been a less conspicuous way of bringing them back.
Where was the need to destroy an entire eighth of Tarentella?

The Board's access count from outsiders have increased sevenfold over the past 24 hours.
This was all brought about by the utter MESS that he created!
Your OTHER new bodyguard Torque is also a problem.

And all this talk about slaughtering the lot of us, threatening us...
I think you chose the wrong people and wrong methods under pressure...
It's a meaningless performance that only serves to show off strength
Surely you must realize how dangerous that is
!
The outside players don't seem to understand the difference between what Torque did and the effects of Kabaki.
I like that. Let's keep them in the dark.
What are we doing volunteering out of the goodness of our hearts then, I wonder?
I hear they're gettin' paid, too.
!
Right?
Seriously.
We've been here playing it cool for your sake.

I'll take you on, one-and-one again, whore!!
Say that again!
Silence.
I heard that, bitch!
Bunch of howling, neutered dogs
Don't be givin' us that attitude!
Sounds good. I'll keep crushing you.
Stop provoking them.
It's...
You useless, weak-spined worms.
How dare you speak that way...
It?
What?!

Someone told me to lie to you just to stay on your good side,
but I don't do that.
Plus, I don't even understand why you have a problem with talking with Chloe.
Well, your friend was right.
If you want to get on my good side,
just lie to me or do whatever you want
everyone here is pretty much a liar already.
But,
I HATE them.
You told me you hated liars.
?

You, me and her are all total strangers. We've never met in real life.
This "family" thing is a lie.
But you and her still act like you're my legal guardians or something.
God, I hate that

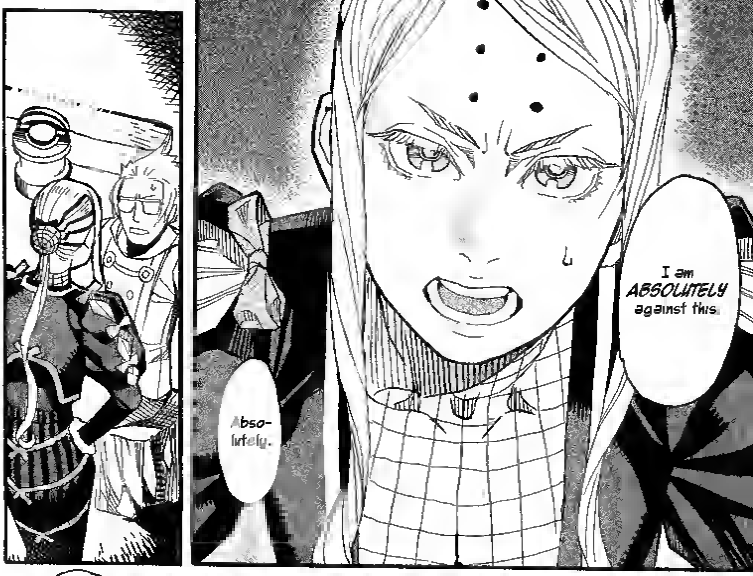
You don't know anything!
Don't give me that crap
Nothing about Lize, or me, or...
about being "worried" about me or whatever!!
Or anything!!
I told you,
.....
She and I are worried for you.
And I think
it's an honest fear.
Listen, whether to trust or not
is something I decide on my own, deep in my stomach.
.....
!
Yesterday,
I lied, too
The worst kind of lie
Weird
I feel like I've said this before
lol
Lize?

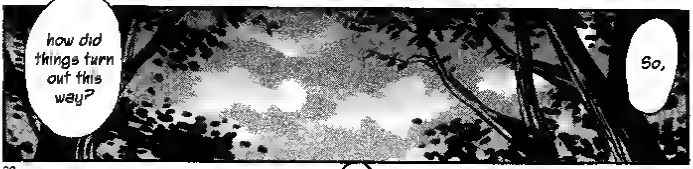
I told her...
I told her I believed her.
When Grandma Mikao went to rescue you, at the very end.
She said she was just gonna run out and beat down Kabaku real quick.
I didn't believe her.
But I said I did,
and she never came back
I,
I didn't have any idea
Everyone knew she was sick and all,
but only I didn't believe her...
26
But I never even tried to understand the truth!
That little red riding hood was right.
I only believed what I wanted to believe

I'm such a horrible person
I am.
No wonder
Grandma hated me.
She hasn't talked to me once since then...
...Ga-
.....
29
Anyways
I'll keep our whole "stepPam" thing intact for now.
It's Chloe's punishment to me, for leaving the Zoo and getting Grandma killed.
I know it, and I accept it.
But,
What were you going to say?
don't. I'm not in the mood.
If you were intending to comfort me or at least try to,

If you think you and her are going to be my guardians, think again.
Because it's not
what I want. Not at all.
30
Crank?
Good evening, all
!?
.....
I need a hom
someone plea
take me
?

My name is Crank, and I am one of your newly-hired bodyguards.
I have a message for everyone aligned with the Zoo at this moment.
The heads of the Zoo and the men from the mercenary group have just finished a discussion in which we decided...
.....
31
Hey can you hear me, you smirking four-eyes?
I want to talk.


I am ABSOLUTELY against this.
Abso-lutely.


So,
how did things turn out this way?

Well, quite easily, Sabure.
Sigh
and started off a two-sided torrent of pent-up frustration and anger, which only escalated.
Itaka provoked them,

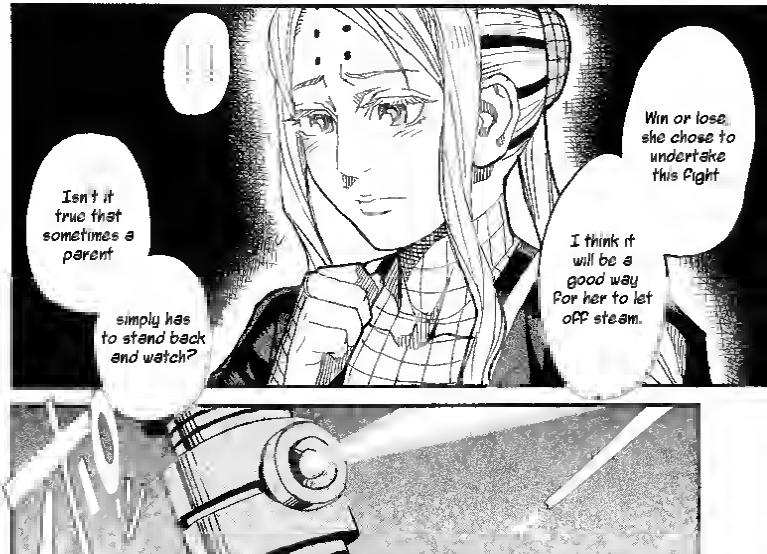
From what I can see,
we've already moved well past the point of simple conversation, anyway.
And then Crank said ..
Why don't we call an end to this pointless discussion?
What do you say?
Rather than drudging up every grudge we hold
I think it's in our best interest to settle the matter quickly and cleanly. Don't you?
It's a perfect stalemate.
The result is that neither side is willing to back down.
What do you suggest?
Each side chooses a representative,
and their battle will settle the matter
A duel.
It's for times like these
that we have an ancient and effective solution

Oh, I didn't think of that...
That's good to hear, though.
They say these new bodyguards we got are very strong, after all.
However, THEY seemed to realize that too
So they fought over THAT part as well.
We cannot accept that offer.
Like you mentioned earlier, we've seen the video files circulating around. We know what the Engine Man is capable of.
So you are afraid, is that it?
Not quite.
But you don't expect us to willingly accept terms that put us at a distinct disadvantage, do you?
Then, let's say that we are not allowed to select Torque.
Understood.
I'll fight, instead.
No problems with that, I trust?
Huh?
34

I just... Don't... trust... him!
And so Itaka threw a fit and demanded to fight,
and after another argument, we decided it would be 3-on-3.
Wait.
Are you strong?
Who knows?
Isn't that the fun of it? ♥
It's too late to stop it now.
The duel has been accepted by both sides.
I'm not against the duel itself.
It's the participants.
However, Gaur is chiefly responsible for the current turn of events.
Since the knife-wielding man is among their duelists, it all works out.
If I had known that would happen, I would have volunteered
I AM the leader and responsible party for the Zoo. It would only make sense...
When I polled for interest among Zoo members, it was Itaka and Gaur who were most enthusiastic about it.
I don't see the problem.

They accepted this duel because they knew Gaur would be fighting.
They knew that they could beat her!
It would be in our best interest to put ME in, since I have a better chance of winning.
Well,
I will leave that discussion to you, in that case.
I'd rather NOT be slugged by Gaur.
Well, um
I understand that as her cyber-mother, you don't want to see her hurt,
but she is enough of a loose cannon that attempts to stop her might backfire.




Win or lose, she chose to undertake this fight
I think it will be a good way for her to let off steam.
!!!
Isn't it true that sometimes a parent
simply has to stand back and watch?

TAP
TAP
Ahem!
We're about to start a three-part duel with six participants,
Featuring Itaka, Crank and Gaur from the Mental Zoo, and Dumpty, Hatter and Griff from the Tea Party Mercenary Squad.
37

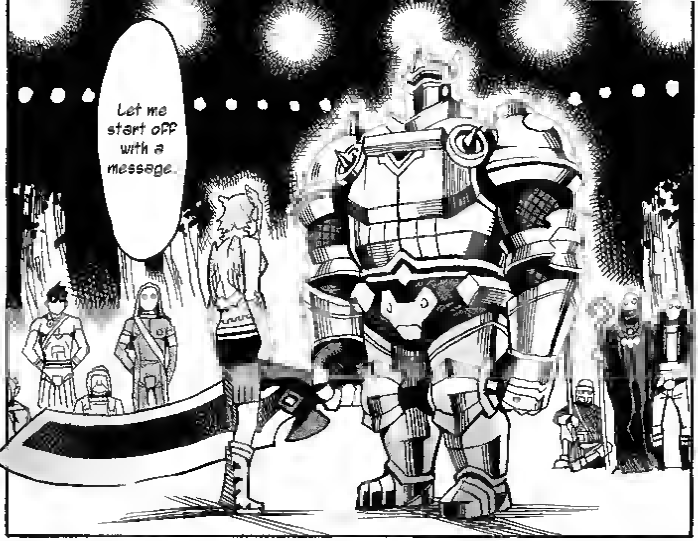
あああああ

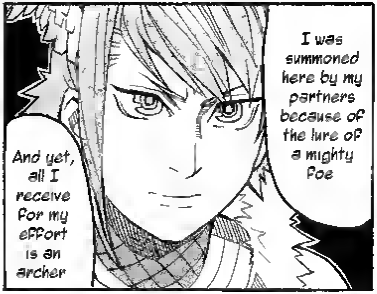
You're an archer class, right?
Won't fighting in a close-range practice-use ring put you at a disadvantage?
What?
Who's in the box?
Wait, wait!
Itaka, listen!
ガラガラガラ
Umm, Miss Itaka,
I'm just worried!
It's Satura.
She's afraid of crowds, but wants to see the fights
……

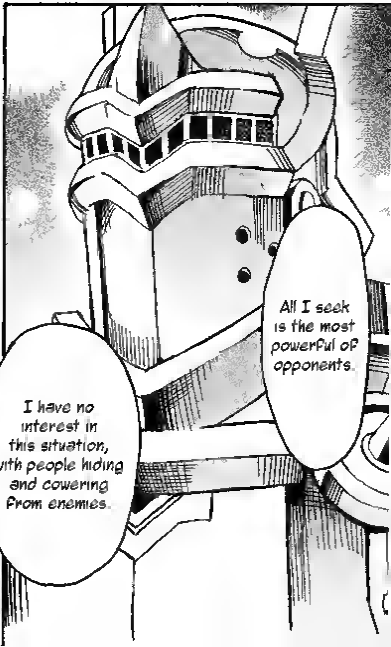
And what if your opponent happens to be a swordsman, who is well suited against you..?
Umm... Satsuke?
Her opponent is Dumpty, right over there
39
Pretty ame-zing
I can't even imagine who'd go that far
!?
Time to go
Bye
Wait, Itaka
Umm,
...You can win, right?

This will be a one-round match, 15 minutes max!
You have my word that I will win.
It's not a problem
40
And now,
begin!!

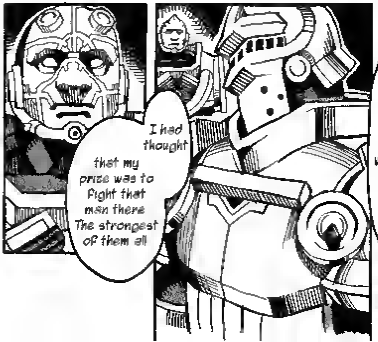
# Chapter 18 - Group Encounter #4


Let me start off with a message.


I was summoned here by my partners because of the lure of a mighty foe
And yet, all I receive for my effort is an archer


All I seek is the most powerful of opponents.
I have no interest in this situation, with people hiding and cowering from enemies.

2

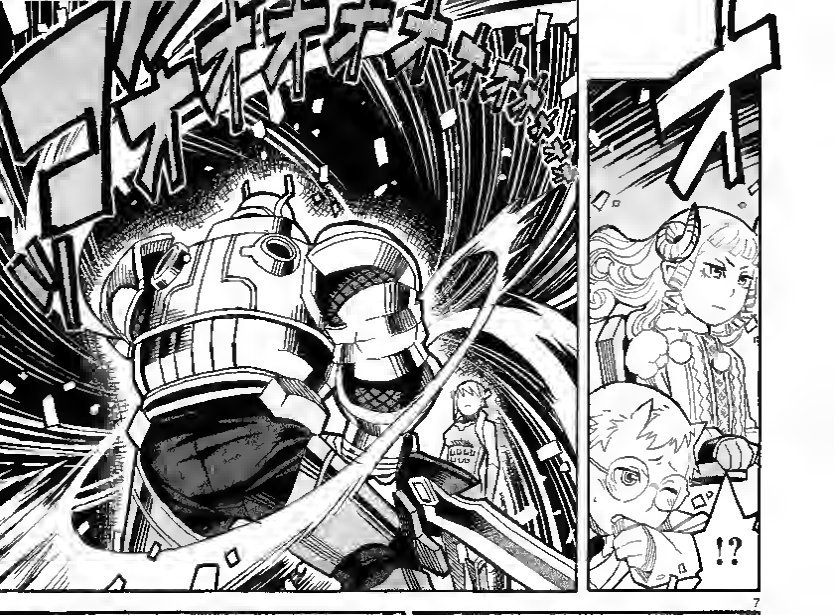

I had thought that my prize was to fight that man there. The strongest of them all.

This guy, Dumpty
I've seen his name on official Linen tournament ranking charts before
How do you see this fight playing out, Torque?
3
I wouldn't give her a 1-in-50 chance of winning.
He's not one of those idiots who relies on sheer force and good equipment.
Don't worry, Torque.
The armor nulls her best weapon, instant death attacks from mid-to-long distance, and bumps his defense against all regular attacks.
Her biggest problem, however, IS that armor of his.
When Itaka says she'll do something, she always does it.
Besides, she decided to participate in this duel.

There is no glory in destroying you right off the bat,
archer
I will give you a chance
Five minutes
I promise that you have five minutes in which I will strike no blow
You may use that time to defeat me in any manner you possess.
What?
What are you saying?
How about it?
You'll never get a better chance.
I said, shut up.
You runt

begin!!
This will be a one-round match, 15 minutes max!
And now,
5

I'M SABURE
Hmmm...
They've been standing stock-still for several minutes now
This is boring!
Do something
Fool
.....


!?

!?
What?
That Dumpty person,
he's going to use a special attack!
I'M SABURE
Gigle!
That's not good,
What's this?
The wind

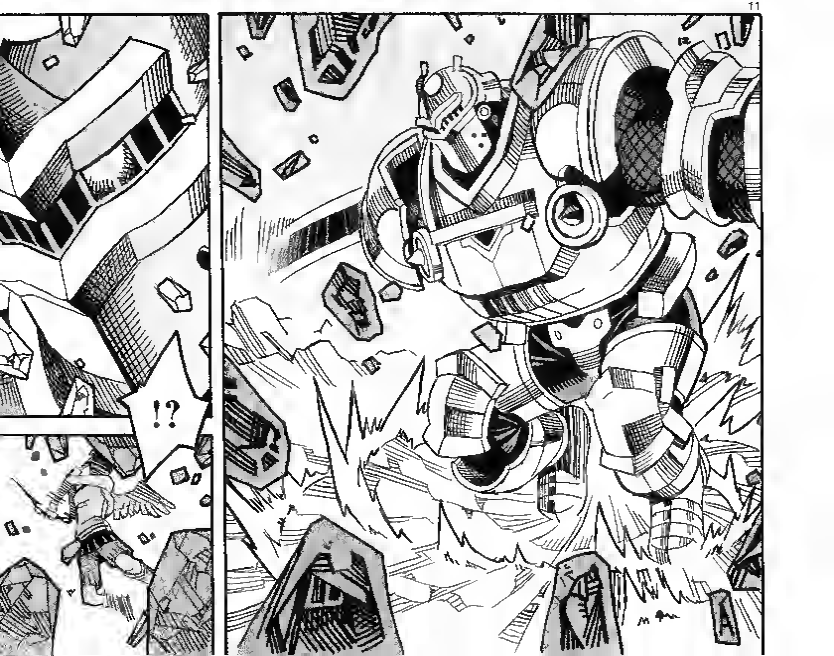
It's a super-secret art that only master-class Knights can wield!
It requires a long prepa-ration period,
But even the highest-level players take fatal amounts of indefensible damage if they get hit head-on!
She needs to attack him now, throw him off balance or break his concen-tration,
or even a slight graze from the attack will kill her!
What are you doing, Itaka?
You have to hit him with SOMETHING soon, or he'll finish pre-paring.
Attack! UH-TAK!
Attack him!
Hurry, hurry, HURRY!
At least take out your bow!
Just the bow!
Please!
8
Has she given up?
What's with her?

This fight is over
There should be plenty of time in Hell for you to regret
the error of your proud and insulting ways
Instant
Death

Wave
Genesis Slash!!!
Destruct

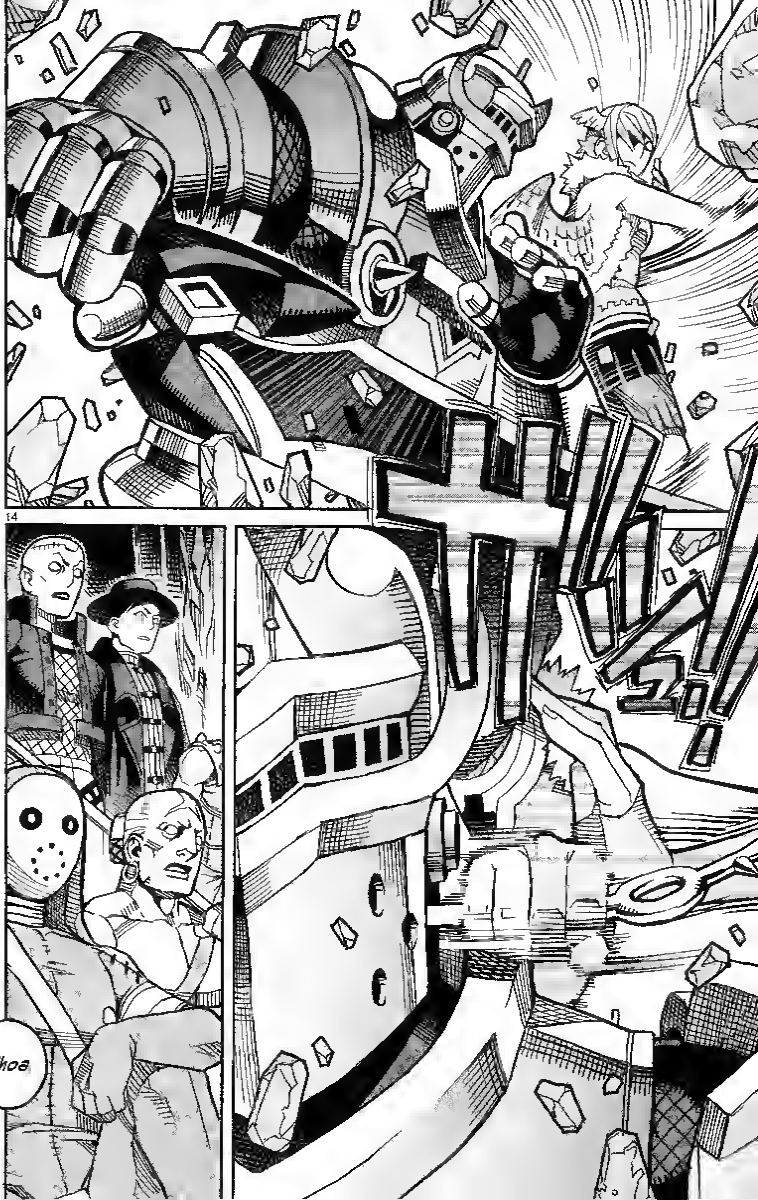
I'M SABURE
オオオオオオオ




!?

!?
Deflec-ted?
She has no arrow
in her hand to speak of.
What?
with her tiny bow?
Bizarre
Using the blast
to jump that high.

!?
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
13


14
Whoa

ギュ!!!
……
F…

OVER!!!
Fight...
16
!?
I'M ABURE
We...
WON?!!
Way to go, Iraka!
Yeah, really!
That was incredible! You were so amazing! Unbelievable!
You're so cool, you're so cool, you're so cool, so cool, so cool!
What? Please!

Very impressive
From outside the field, all we saw was wind and pieces of rubble
What did you DO, Itaka?
17
I knew it was theoretically possible, but I've never seen it done in a practical situation
Catching the shards of ground with your bow to blind the opponent
The problem is,
how was she able to read his attack plan so far ahead to know that he would use a finishing move, there?
!
His reaction was dulled for a second when he saw no arrow
It became the deciding factor in the fight
He could have easily stopped that
Please, don't overlook our friend Dumpty
Is that what you did?
Why didn't you just shoot a normal arrow?

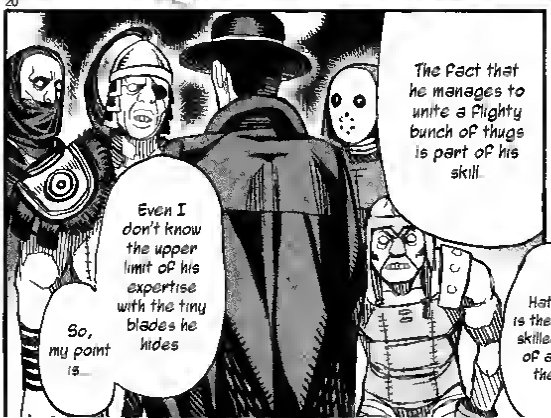
Hey
you
How amateur of me!
You were leading me by the nose,
From the very start, weren't you?
First instant!!
It was that!
Ung!
I'm sorry
For insulting you, mind games or not
You haven't hurt anyone in the Zoo You're not even that close with these people
Why-
18
Hell is this Feeling ...?
Huh ?!
the-
What-
If you want a personal rematch, I'm willing anytime
Bye.

It was a perfectly aimed and timed counterattack.
But now this means
we're on our last legs
And the next match is mine.
I'm feeling the pressure.
I think you'll find
the next match will be over quickly, too
It's up to me to show you that she's not the only one
who knows how to use quality counters

Huh?
Sabure
Uh,
what happened to your agora-phobia?
Huhh?!
Hey, you
I want to talk.
Are you okay?
What are you doing?
?
!?
What's wrong, Sabure?
Hey!

I see
Should be good




The fact that he manages to unite a flighty bunch of thugs is part of his skill
Even I don't know the upper limit of his expertise with the tiny blades he hides
So, my point is...
Hatter is the most skilled out of all of them

Whatever trick it is you've got up your sleeve,
use maximum care
Well, well.
I didn't expect you to give me advice.
It's not just for you.
After all,
this is a fight for the fate
of everyone here in the zoo.
I'll keep that in mind
Wait a minute!
What are you-
Stop, what's the
Damn him!
What is he thinking?
?
And now, time for our second round.
Featuring Hatter vs. Crank!
Take your places, gentlemen!

And begin!
No—
He can't.
It's worth testing once!
But...

Oh!

Overrrr!!!
Fight...

24

That was an interesting trick
But...
The winner
Hatter!

What-
just-
Umm,
Itaka?
Don't aim your bow at him!
M,
No!
Wait!
Never mind.
No,
I see what happened in this fight.
I'M SABURE
Aha!
I understand now, Gigia
He threw these
at four of Crank's vital locations the instant the match began...
They're terrifying weapons that cause mid-size explosions when they pierce an enemy's body, not to mention they have an instant kill effect.
First of all,
What you saw that Hatter Fellow throw at Crank are called explosive seals.
What?

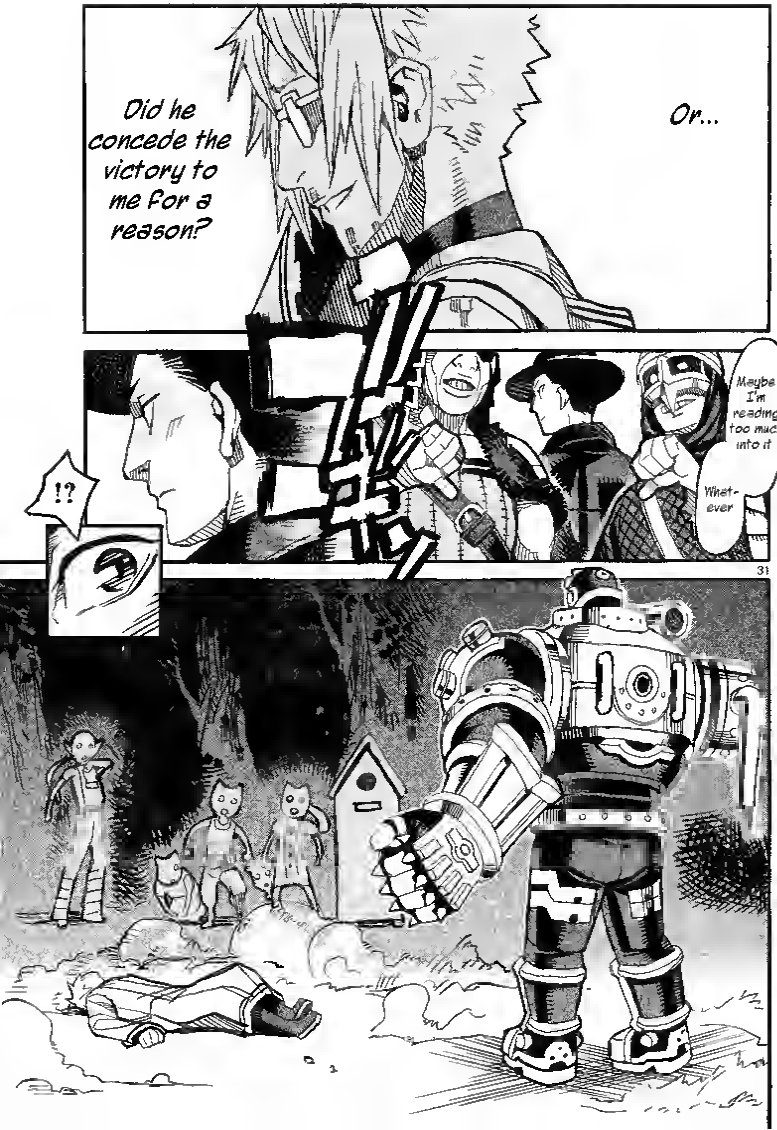
ぱんぱん
ぱんぱん

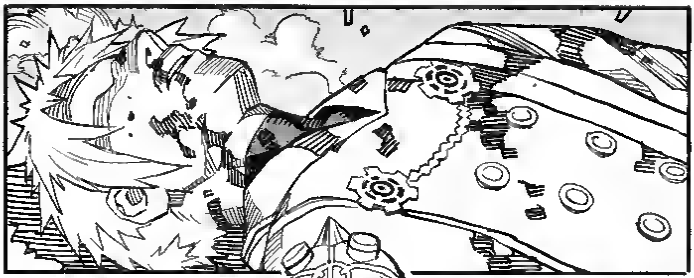
What were those?
It looked like Crank spun out these big threads.
You know your whole setting is getting really weird.
SMARTY-PANTS BOX
Dimensional rings.
The threads themselves do no damage, but whatever passes through them is reflected back to the attacker.
However...
!?
!?

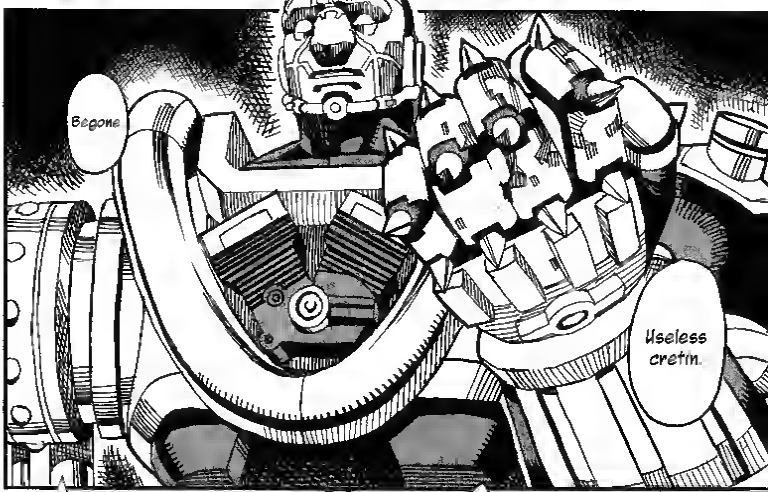
...in about four seconds, which you can see clearly when you slow the video file down.
What's wrong with that picture?
Why is Hatter unharmed, when he should have taken all of Crank's counter?

That attack was a bluff from the start
He had the explosive seals set to blow up before they hit the target,
and in the instant he determined the tool Crank was going to use,
he settled on a merciless close-range combo that the dimensional ring couldn't stop
So what decided this fight was the fact that Hatter realized Crank was a master of counters, in those few seconds, and
29
Huh?
Umm,
Wait,
didn't Crank say something about that?
yeah
It's up to me to show you that she's not the only one
who knows how to use quality counters
Oh.

Seems like that one was over in a second. Boy, that was embarrasing.
I'm really sorry, folks.
I got a little carried away, and ran my mouth,
and I paid the price for it in that fight. Ha ha ha.
What can I say? I guess...
Wait a minute...
Am I wrong, or is he just a plain old IDIOT?!
Don't aim your bow at him!!
N-no,
No, Itaka!
Is he just a fool?


Did he concede the victory to me for a reason?
Or...
Maybe I'm reading too much into it
Whatever
!?




Begone
Useless cretin.

Crank!!
What was that?
Did he hit him?
.....
.....!?

Are you all right, Crank?!
Yes
What a terrible thing to do!
Torque, I didn't think you were the kind of person who...
Oh man, he HIT him?!
For real?!
I didn't think that huge tank would actually DO something like that!!
33
Now it's one-to-one
And it's best-of-three, so it's all on my shoulders
FOOL FOOL FOOL
CRETIN!!
Are you up there?
Gsurf

I want to talk
Would you come down?
Umm
Huh?!
34
Well,
We're about to start the third and final round, between Griff and Gaur
But...
Huh?

Huh?
Umm,
I've just received word from the head mistress,
and they would like an hour break on account of dinnertime.
Dinner?
What the hell?
35
.....

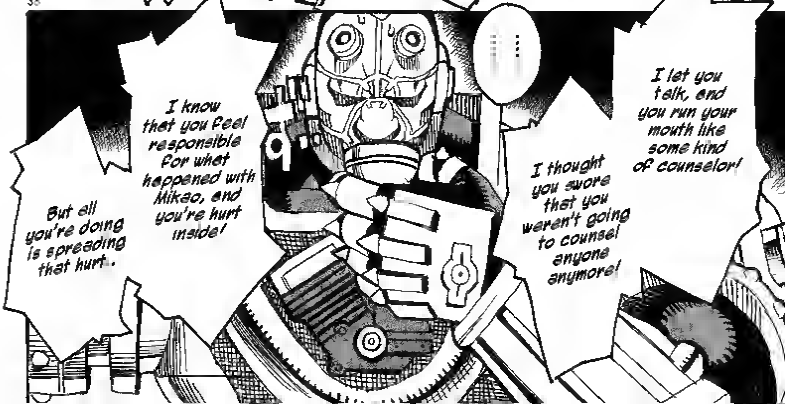
.....

Your mother is against the idea.
Psh
What-ever
Don't care about you
What's wrong with your attitude?
At the least
it's no manner to be bringing to the dinner table with your parents.
What?
You know the connection between theater therapy and step-families, don't you?
Don't bite back at every little thing
Mother?
Who?

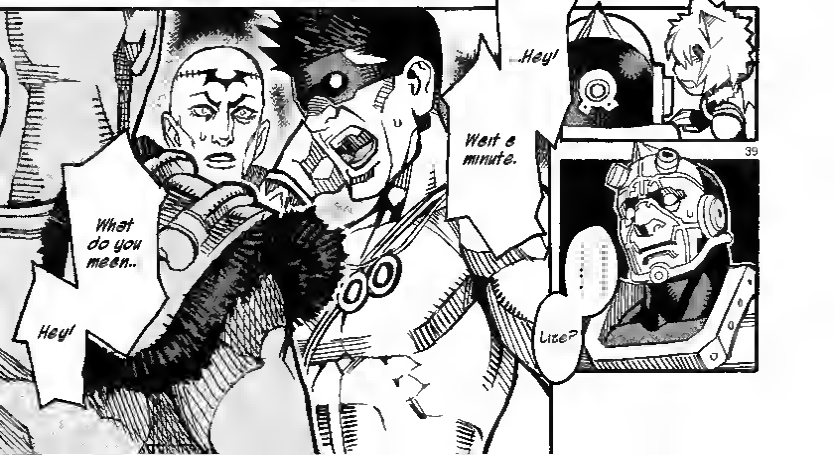
You're planning to fight this GriFF person, who picked on Gecko, aren't you?
So, what idea are you against?
Not planning to, I AM going to
But
You don't even think you can beat him, do you?
So you want me to stop, just because you're against it?
You want me to forfeit, and suffer all that shame?
37
Umm, what do you mean?
That's how you hope to punish yourself
You hope that by leaving the Zoo against orders, and then losing in a huge fight that everyone is depending on, you'll finally lose your place here.
Every time you insist on something crazy, there's a part of your mind that knows it really is crazy
I'm right, then

How long do you keep intending to take things out on everyone else?
You think I WANT to lose?!
That filthy, messed-up bastard is my ENEMY!
There's going to be a limit someday, and you'll hit it!
Screw that!!
Even you've known that, and for quite a long time,
I'm gonna KILL my enemy with my own hands, I SWEAR it!!
But you won't admit it until someone else tells you!
That's how I've lived my life!




I know that you feel responsible for what happened with Mikao, and you're hurt inside!
But all you're doing is spreading that hurt..
I let you talk, and you run your mouth like some kind of counselor!
I thought you swore that you weren't going to counsel anyone anymore!

You couldn't even save Lize when it counted!
but what good has that done you so far?!
You haven't saved a single person!
Shut up, shut up, SHUT UP!!
Ge-
You act like you're some counselor, pretending you know what's going on,
Nothing!!!


...Hey!
Wait a minute.
What do you mean..
Hey!
Lize?

We've got big trouble, Hatter.
I know what he's like
If he sees what's going on, he's gonna be PISSED that we left him out.

What's going on?
What is it?

Come on,
I already asked once. What is it?
We couldn't ever get a hold of him before,
but he chooses NOW to show up? Great.
You don't mean

Mitsuki...
Is coming...?

# Chapter 19 - Group Encounter #5



Translated by mako - http://ikaga.org/
Edited by somebodyelse - secondhandscans.blogspot.com

Huh?

The hell, Tramp, where'd you go?
Say,
isn't the tourney going on right now?
Why are they taking a break?
What are you talking about?
You told us yourself, earlier
The Zoo people are eatin', so we gotta wait
Ah, that's right.
Say,
Any of you got a record of the last match?
I wanna see it again

WEEEEN
The second match was instakill, man...
Doubt you'll be able to see much...
That's Fine.
Thanks.

3
.....

Anyway,
I know you're opposed to my entering the tournament.
So
Let's talk about what we're gonna do
I'll go in your stead
Hey!
I'm the one responsible on our side—
We'll have a better chance of winning if I—
!!
!?

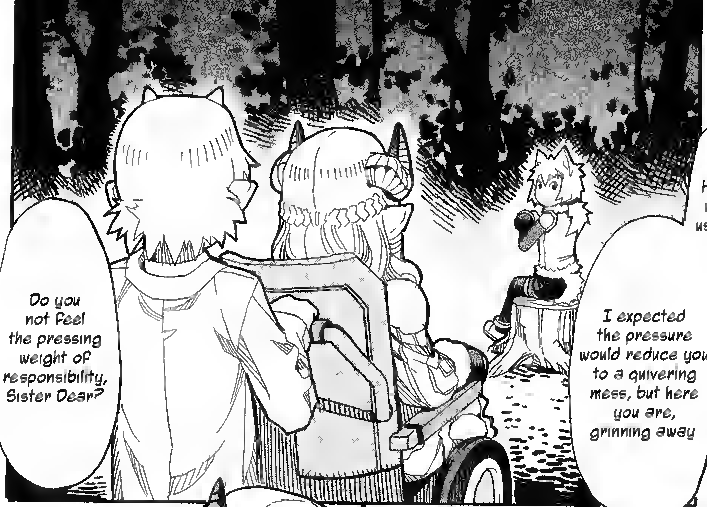
Are you not aware, Gaur
Of the difference in power between you and me.

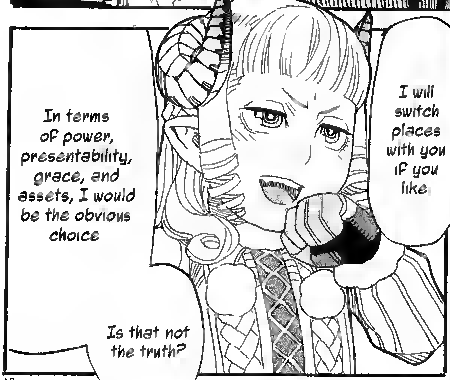
Who cares about power
.....
6
If you're asking for a fight, I'll give one to you, no questions asked.
I've always wanted to send you flying with these fists...
ベちゃ
Whaa?!

Cut it out,
you two
It's dinner-time
Sit down and eat
The hell is this meat blob?!
Is this unappetizing-looking thing supposed to be dinner?
I mean, eating's not just about filling your stomach...
So you don't know, do you
Huh?! Dunno what?!
This is the Dragon Steak, a rare item.
Eating it makes all your stats go up
If you want to win against that merc Griff,
the least you could do is eat up
Wait- Wha-
Dear, what are you...

This quarrel started when Gaur saved a kid who was being roughed up, right?
She doesn't have anything to be ashamed of. She has a legitimate reason to fight
B-but...
You know how Gaur is, don't you?
She's not the type to take a scolding to heart.
Sometimes being in battle lets you express yourself.
There's nothing wrong about fighting with everything you've got.
If you look at Griff's stats, his numbers aren't far from Gaur's.
The odds are fifty-fifty.
But, what if she loses
CRETIN!!
Who cares what the rest of them think
If we're a family, let's act like one
I understand that as Director, you're thinking about everyone in the Coo.
But we're here to be a stepfam.

I believe in you
You're going to win, Gaun
!!!
You're definitely not weak
Your right claws broke in the last fight
Don't forget that
You can use this instead
Oh my
He's a weird guy


How un-usual.
I expected the pressure would reduce you to a quivering mess, but here you are, grinning away
Do you not feel the pressing weight of responsibility, Sister Dear?

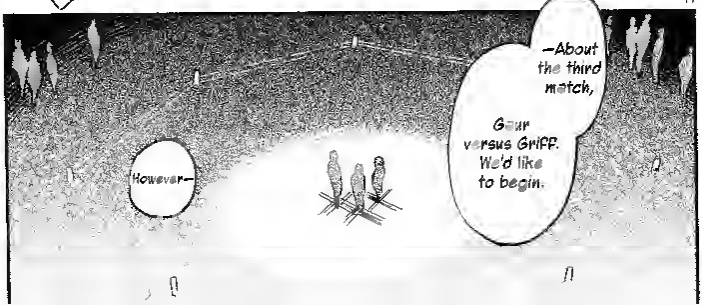

I will switch places with you IF you like.
In terms of power, presentability, grace, and assets, I would be the obvious choice
Is that not the truth?

Merino
.....
Umm, Miss Gaur, I-

I wanted to say, thanks for saving me earlier.

Know your place, Sister Dear, and step aside...
Just one moment!
You mean about subbing for me? Don't wanna hear about it...
Why are the people I hate all treating me the same way...
Wait just one second!
We, we
Don't you ignore me!
Ah
Yes
Don't worry about it, Geeko
No big deal
I'm having an important conversation with Sister Dear—
Shut your mouth for a while, Geeko
Ah
Yes'm
You don't have any confidence in winning, do you?! You're just swollen up with worthless pride!
Go on, see if I care!
Suffer a humiliating defeat, followed by miserable tears.




—About the third match,
Gaur versus Griff. We'd like to begin.
However—

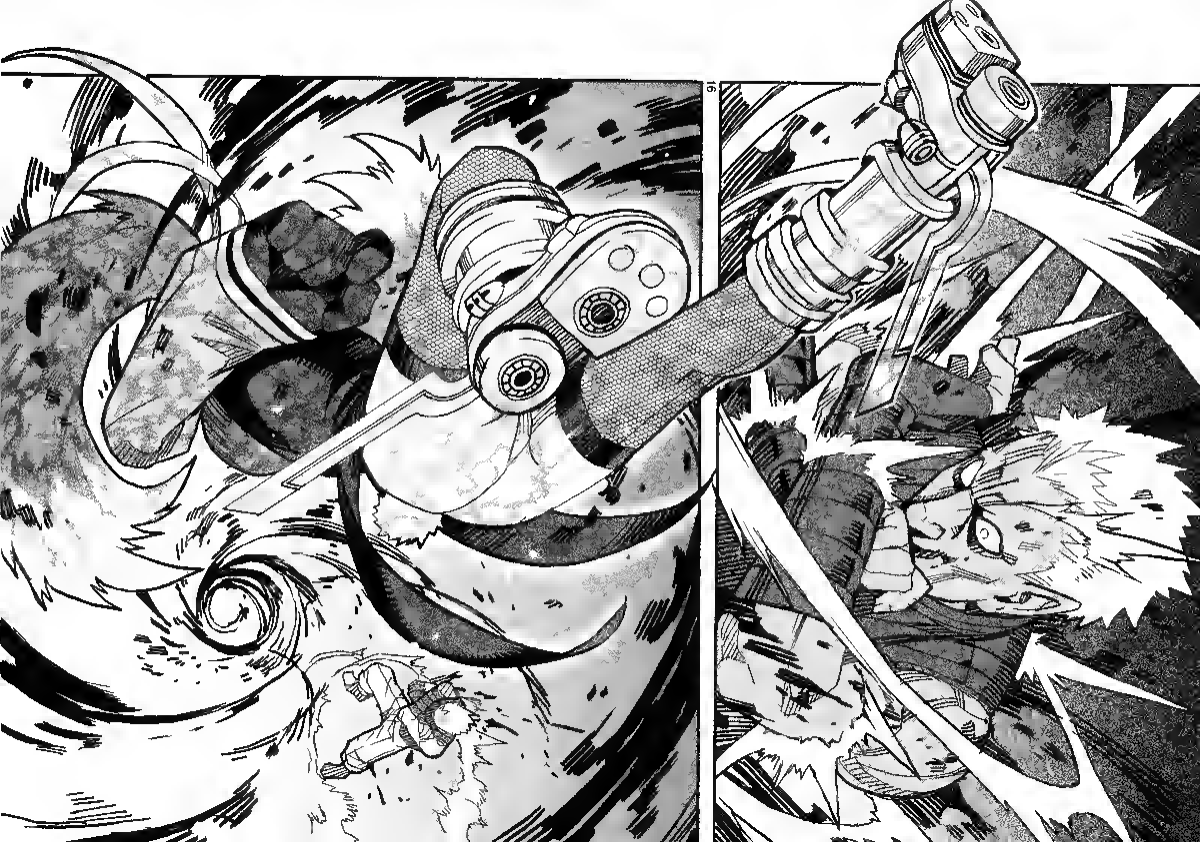
It's a bit sudden,
But I've received word of a last-minute substitution
?
.....
12
Merino!!
You were working behind the scenes...!
はんしゃ!
sFx: gash

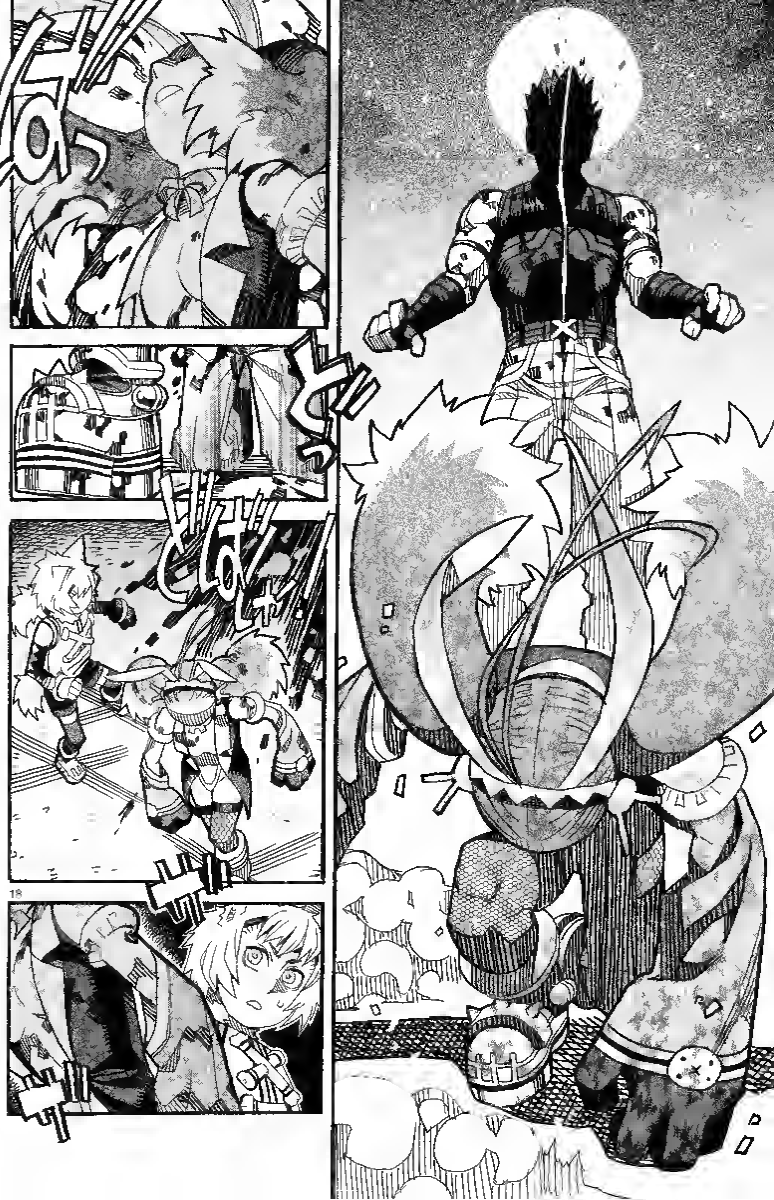
!?
Ahh
Not again
I ended up killing some nobody.
13
But it's your fault.
I even transformed like this and asked nicely.
You flipped out
and suddenly stabbed at me.

Huh?
!?

I slashed all your vital points,
so why aren't you dead?
Truly a mystery
ゾクッ
15

The answer is simple
You were carrying an instant-revive
Freaking out like that was totally uncool
Keep your eyes on him, Griff!
He's coming—
What a damn chicken
179

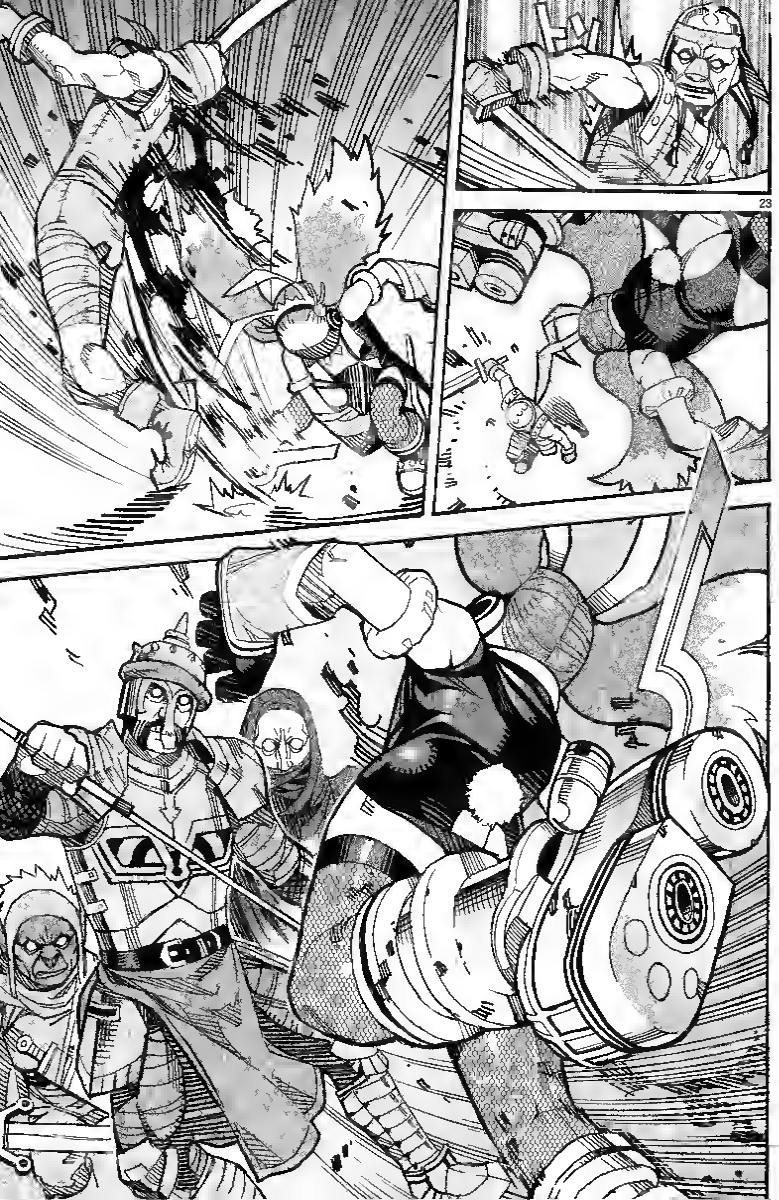



ばっ
どっ
ばばっ

Hiya everybody
You all left me out of the loop and were having so much fun,
So I thought I'd give you a bit of a scare
So?
Was everyone surprised?
.....
Been doing okay?
Huh?
Y'all seem kinda down
Mitsuki
!!!

Are we supposed to take
what you just did to Griff as a joke?
Aw, shucks, guys.
Anyway, we were in practice mode,
I just gave him a scare, just a scare.
so it's not like I killed him for real...
20
Oh, shoot.
I forgot to charge up the practice field
Huh?

Mitsuki!
The ability you used to disguise yourself as Tramp
requires the user
to kill the target at close range
Mitsuki
Tell me why you did this...
Oh? You knew?
Gosh
Anyway,
It's not good to neglect your boss
I told you already
It was just a surprise
Bunnies'll die from loneliness, ya know
Who's our fucking boss?!
You
Fucking netfag!



Do you want a scolding?
Don't get carried away, Mitsuki

There's no way you'll win
You know that, don't you?
Oh?
Hatter, are you standing against me?
Well,
I wonder
TAP
TAP
Huh
!?

28
If you're the sub, then that's fine
But I'm supposed to be your opponent, right?
Why are you all enjoying yourselves and ignoring me?
!?
So fight!
I'm gonna
Right now! Against me!
Tear you to shreds!
What's
with her?
It's painful how she can't read the mood
Sister Dear is such a fool
Mm, mm, Mmise Gaur?!

Oh boy
OBJECTION!
Yesh?
Umm, Mr Hatter?
It's impossible to continue the tournament like this
So why don't we end it here
Hey ..
Why'd you hafta go and stick your neck in?!
Well...
I suppose that would be best.
We'll end it here, right?
Um
But...
27
Heh
.....

AHAHA
HAHAH
AHAHA
HAHAH
AHAH
Aha.
Ha.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
Ahh
Fine, Miss Gaur
Let's play
!?
O-
kay

What's your desire this time? Humiliation play?
You're resolved to embarrass yourself in front of everyone, huh?
We had a little bit of fun together
but I guess you haven't gotten enough
29
Oh shut up
We finally agreed to a match, and you're going to break it up?
Then fine, have it your way
I'll spill the location of the Zoo, and the other players will destroy everything
?
Hey now
We're having a private talk
Get away from Gaur right now!
If you don't, I'll—
Mitsuki?
What did you just say to Gaur...?!

……
It's your choice as Director, Chloe.
You can stick up for Gaur and abandon everyone else,
or Gaur can sacrifice herself for the Zoo's sake
Well, "Sacrifice" is a bit much. It's just messing around in practice mode. Don't worry, I won't kill her.
Just gonna manhandle her a bit
……
!!
You—
You don't—

Don't tell me you're pissing your pants?
What's wrong, missy?
I can't speak
Huh?
That's weird
Why
Can't
What's wrong

That stubborn bravery is the cutest part of you
Like, "I'm gonna do my best and fight for everyone's sake."
But this is where you've gotta speak up for yourself
If you don't, I'll—
Mitsuki!
Get away from Gaur right this second!
Stop.

Just go away!
Shaddup! Stop getting in my way!
Get out of my sight! Get out of my life!
I hate you!
...!
Gaun!
I'll knock out this psycho piece of shit freak
Phew
If you interfere again,
I'll never forgive you
Somehow my voice is back
32

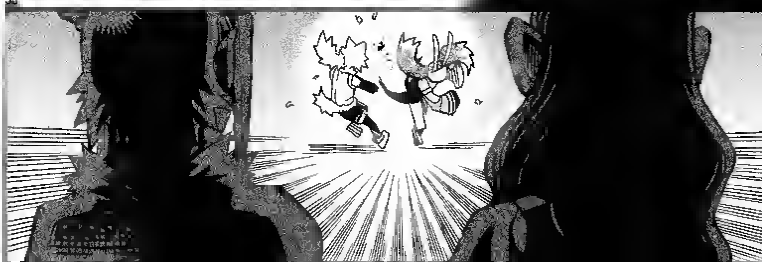
Turns out you're a cheeky brat with a potty mouth, eh? Not cute at all.
Sheesh...
I've heard enough
If we're doing this
Let's get started

At best, one can expect
the resistance of a shoddy, threadbare, ten-year-old dustrag
Astronomical difference in strength notwithstanding,
she doesn't look like she'll put up much of a fight.
Whoa, whoa...
They're starting? They're starting?!
Can Miss Gaur win? Can she?
Ahh
Of course not
No matter
It has nothing to do with me
Are you okay with that, Miss Merino?
Miss Merino...
This way,
she'll learn a valuable lesson
She's such a blockhead She doesn't know her own place Let her suffer
34

Are you okay, Miss Chloe?
Huh?
Yes...
Hold on, Mitsuki...!
I'm telling you I'm serious Chloe
If you don't listen to me, all the other players are gonna find out where we are.
I Feel for you, Chloe
Being around that ill-mannered Gaur must be a tough gig
What?!
I'm gonna pound that stuck-up tomboy into the ground.
I bet you'll get a kick out of that
What?!
I'd never...!
Oh, right, you're the mother.
But maybe it's just you who feels that way.
When she said earlier to get out of her life,
Who do you think she was really saying that to? To me, or to you?

It'll be fine.
Don't suffer in silence
.....
36
Why so stiff, liddle Gaur?
Are ye really gonna beat me with your knees shaking like that?
I made a promise to Grandma Mikao
I'll look out for Gaur

So move as much as you want.
You're not tied up this time,
Then get on with it
I'm...
Shut up!
37



Ridi-culous
HA
AHA
HA
HA
HA
HA!
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA!

ドガ
?
……
ゾクゾクゾク
……
Ниня?

ナツノクモ ④

spinning web

THE END

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Natsuno Kumo

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